













# OWEN:—A WAIF

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“NO CHURCH” AND “~~HIGH CHURCH.~~”

“What a waive and stray is that man that hath not Thy marks upon him!”

DONNE.

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
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# OWEN:—A W A I F.

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## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT OWEN EXPECTED.

OWEN was so far from a hero, that he never allowed his love troubles to float uppermost. His co-mates and brothers in desk-work would have found it difficult to believe in any change; he was a hard worker, who in business hours sought to discharge faithfully those duties for which the house of Cherbury paid him. He might have been a trifle more grave over his account-books; smiled  a

little more effort at the few practical jokes of his companions, which a sharp head-clerk's absence occasionally allowed ; but his calculations were ever exact, and he did an excellent day's work, even when his heart was smarting under his first disappointment.

Yes, it was a disappointment, after all—one of the greatest and the most acute, because Owen would not confess to himself that he had ever had a right to think of Ruth Dell. Therefore his morbid feelings, and a sense of having lost his chance of the greatest, brightest reward that his hopes could look forward to and long for, were all unwarrantable. His duty was to check those feelings; he would be a very child to show them to the light, and let the few friends whom he owned be witness to such foolish weakness. He was a man, and would live down all disappointment; his should be a heart for ever hard to guess at!

But he had dreamed and awakened

from a fancy picture, was the fate of more than him; others had suffered and grown strong, and what others had had the power to do, he felt would not fail him at his need. She had never known, and she would never know, what idol he had raised in the inner temple, for a secret worship known but to himself; if the temple were a ruin, still he had betrayed nothing. There was even a morbid satisfaction in believing things had progressed much further than they had; that Mr. Glindon and Ruth were on the eve of an engagement, and every day might bring the tidings home to him. From the fragments he had gathered at Ruth's father's cottage, from Glindon's manner on that evening, detailed in our last chapter, he had framed her story, and, though it clouded the landscape, he believed in it. It was a wild romance, and he had been a visionary; he, whose duties in a working world should have taught him better. So to the ledger and day-book, and away with

the fancies of youth from that day forth. Such fancies had perplexed him, and, to win in the hard race before him, one should be cool, collected, of business and money-getting habits.

Time went quietly along some nine or twelve months after this, and Owen saw but little of Ruth Dell. He avoided Ansted, and never curtailed his visits to his little ward, in order that he might find time to cross the fields in search of one who had held the first place in his heart, from an age that he would have blushed to confess. Once or twice there was no escaping Ruth; at her uncle's house, principally in the holidays, she took her place in the straight monotonous path he was pursuing, and was kind and gentle, and ever the same to him; but he was growing older, stronger every day, and his was a nature that could subdue itself. His was a nature, too, that could quickly harden, that a firm mind would force to harden, as a cure for a

romantic disease which had been a trouble to him; and yet, possibly at this particular period of which we write, Owen was more unsettled, if practical and cold, than at any other time before or since.

It did not lighten his thoughts to hear no news of an engagement; he knew Mr. Glindon was consulting surgeon at the great Ansted school, that Glindon and Ruth must meet frequently, that the man at least was in love with her—he was sure of that!—and that all would follow in due course; and if a little later than Owen had at first imagined—what mattered it?

Did it matter either that John Dell had seen Mr. Glindon, and thought him a shrewd, intelligent fellow, who would succeed in the world—that once during the last Midsummer holidays Glindon had called at Kennington, and exchanged with Owen the coldest of civilities? It mattered nothing to him—nothing ailed or affected him, he assured John Dell one day, when that old



friend thought he was looking pale, and told him so.

"Is there much to trouble your mind at present, young fellow?" said Dell, with that rough precipitancy of speech which took away all idea of his feeling much interest in the reply. And yet John Dell, at that time, was regarding him somewhat wistfully.

"Nothing."

"‘Stick to your business,’ is a good motto; but there is a sticking too close to one idea, one task—till the whole thing becomes a trifle too heavy."

"Do you think so?"

"I know so," affirmed Dell, positively.

"My business is not a trifle too heavy for me, Mr. Dell—I am growing stronger and more confident every day under it."

"You want change."

Owen shook his head.

"You have taken no holidays this year—save an hour now and then, to see that ward of yours."

"It don't strike me that you admire much change yourself, Mr. Dell," said Owen, with a laugh. "Practice, not precept, for me."

"If you'll follow my example, I'll take a week to-morrow," said Dell, sharply, and his eyes protruded horribly with the suggestion.

"I've nowhere to go."

"My brother's cottage, near Ansted."

Owen winced.

"Or the sea-side—Margate if you like, along with the Cockney tribe, at which so many fine people sneer. A good pickling in the sea would do you a world of good."

"I was never better in my life."

"*That's a lie!*"

Owen coloured to the roots of his closely cropped hair. The lie direct was unpleasant and unpalatable; and John Dell, albeit the best of men in Owen's opinion, rendered objectionable remarks still more galling, by the crude, biting way in which they were delivered. Never a man had less of fine

feelings, or a regard for them in others, than Dell. He wielded his tongue, as he wielded at times his hammer, and it fell very often with a *clang*, and jarred horribly.

“Think it what you like, sir.”

They were facing each other at the open parlour window, that looked into the little back garden; Dell in his work-of-day suit, with his arm on the window sill, enjoying his after-supper pipe. Ruth had returned to Ansted only yesterday, and perhaps her absence was testing her uncle's temper again. Or was it nearer the truth to surmise that her uncle was trying Owen—seeking in his own way, after his own manner, to probe to the depths all that had kept the youth facing him so dull and grave lately.

“Well, I'll think it a lie,” he said coolly, “because I have known you less dull in my experience, and to assert to the contrary is to try and deceive me. And I won't be deceived,” he said, brusquely.  
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Owen felt uneasy. Dell was a plain speaker, and might ask an uncomfortable question at any moment.

"Perhaps I haven't a right to press you so hard, Owen," and his hand smote our hero on the shoulder; "but you are like a son of mine now; and if there's any trouble under that waistcoat, why, I should like to share it with you, or chase it away. And it was a plaguey lie to say you were never better to me—me, a man conceited enough in his knowledge of human nature for fifty. Why, Owen, everything's at sixes and sevens."

"Where?"

"In that morbid anatomy of yours, to be sure. You're not so sharp as you were—more like a worn-out old mill-horse than anything else. You don't persevere—you drag on."

"I stick to my work, you own that."

"Yes, but with as much outward interest as the anemone has in the slimy rock it

holds fast to," said Dell—"your heart's gone."

"Eh?"

And Owen coloured once more, and looked indignantly at his lecturer.

"The man with no heart in his work is a machine—and a fool."

"A machine, granted—why a fool?"

"A fool to remain at a task he will never excel in," cried Dell. "Did a machine ever get on in the world, I wonder?"

"You are severe on me to-night, Mr. Dell."

"I want to rouse you," said Dell, less vigorously; "you have changed for the worse, and I must cry stop, if I fail in turning you. Why, Owen, I never see you open a bible now—and you did once pretty regularly for a youth. And—and I don't find you at my elbow at church now. It was only a habit of yours, Owen—I knew that—but it was a good one, and might have led to more good."

Dell looked earnestly, almost reproachfully, at him, and Owen's heart was touched. A new stubbornness, of which he had been unaware himself, melted for a moment, and in that moment there hovered on his lips all his trouble. But a momentary impulse, and then the secret dropped like a dead weight to the bottom of his heart again, where it lay, cold and heavy. Dell was a man who would have heard all, and offered no sympathy, thought Owen; let him keep his own counsel, and be wise. He could but remember one to whom that secret, at such a moment, might have been told, and she had been a mother to him in a time of tribulation, and worked all that good in him for which he thanked her often yet, never his God. And she was dead, and there would be never a woman, mother or wife, to take her place and offer her faithful bosom as a pillow to his heated brain. He wondered, in that bitter moment, whether he would not have been a happier man had

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he drifted away on the dark waters from the midst of which she saved him.

Perhaps it was sixteen or seventeen months before the crisis came which Owen had expected. In that time the reader may think Owen should have struck for himself, and perhaps given a turn to his love affair. But Owen was a shrewd young man, and seldom precipitate; he had guessed there was no love to be aroused for him in the heart of Ruth Dell, and he shrank from meeting mortification and vexation of spirit. She was a sister, and had faith in him yet; let them keep their old friendly relations, from which a word of his would affright her for ever. In the face of a hope he might have dashed forward; with the consciousness that one was in advance of him, and must win, he hung back like a sensible man.

"Look here," said Dell one evening, when Owen entered the house, "here's a long letter that may surprise you."

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"From whom?"

"Glindon, the doctor."

Owen felt inclined to drop the letter, or tear it in a hundred pieces, the opposing element of which he had spoken throbbed so powerfully within him. However, he mastered himself sufficiently to pass quickly the letter across the table to Dell.

"I'm a bad hand at reading long letters. Will you tell me the substance of it?"

"Can't you guess?"

Owen met the protuberant eyes. It was a subject he must learn to face, and he made the effort to confront it then.

"It concerns Ruth?"

"Ay."

"It asks your consent to an engagement?"

"Spoken like an oracle, Owen of ours."

Owen dived to the depths of his pocket, and brought forth a cigar-case, that was new to John Dell.

"Where did you get that *thing*?" Dell asked, disparagingly.



"Bought it," was the quiet response.

"So you've taken to smoking, after all. It's a bad habit."

"It's soothing, I have heard you say."

"Ay, and expensive. And it's not every man that can content himself with one pipe or cigar a day, like me. What do you want soothing for?"

"Oh, everybody smokes now," said Owen, evasively.

"I hate to hear a man quote everybody as a precedent. Everybody is a snare and a temptation."

"But —"

"But, Owen, what makes you dart away from a subject that should be as interesting to you as to me? Don't you care for Ruth's future?"

"As a sister's."

"Then sit down, and quietly talk the matter over with me. You like a brother, I like an old father, to whom trouble has come."

and on

“A trouble!”—and Owen looked anxiously toward him.

A trouble to John Dell as well as to him—it was strange.

“You shall give me your advice, Owen,” said he; “though I shan’t take it, because I never cared for any one’s advice but my own.”

“Then I’ll save my breath, Mr. Dell.”

“No, don’t do that.”

“I have no advice to offer—I have no right.”

“Dash it!—I give you the right, don’t I?”

John Dell lumped into a seat, and began nervously beating the table with the letter of Arthur Glindon’s. He was put out that evening, and made no attempt to conceal it.

“Sit down, sit down, Owen, and don’t hang about like a great gawky,” he said; and Owen sat down accordingly, and, altering his mind about smoking that evening, placed his cigar case on the table, where it

lay between him and John Dell, with an enamelled Messalina-like head, in showy relief against the dark-green Morocco. John Dell surveyed this head once or twice, and fidgeted and twitched angrily his right grey whisker, as though it put him out.

“Subject number one uppermost; and to be carefully filed before subject number two is laid before us,” said Dell. “Subject number one, now?”

He had pinned Owen to it, and Owen braced his nerves and kept no longer his dark eyes downwards.

“I’ll read you the letter,” continued Dell, “and if you’ve no advice to offer, why you can leave it alone. He’s a bit of a blunderer, for he dashes off without a date, like a silly woman, and writes downhill anyhow, like a wretched author I knew once.”

It was a well written courteous letter, at which no one, however prejudiced, could find fault. It was an earnest letter, too,

and Owen felt it was not a false pretence of earnestness. A false letter always betrays itself, and mock sentiment on paper has a mark of its own which there is no mistaking. This letter was not what Owen expected; he had no admiration for Mr. Glindon, but he felt that Mr. Glindon wrote well, and meant what he wrote; and that possibly he had painted that gentleman in darker colours than he deserved. At all events the man loved Ruth Dell, and though Owen bore him no esteem for that, on the contrary, hated him with a new intensity for which he could not account, he could but say at the conclusion, "a fair statement."

"Well, it's fair enough, as you say," assented John Dell; "it states his case, his love for Ruth, his opinion that Ruth loves him; it tells us that he has seen her father, whose opinion is worth about as much as his caterpillar-eaten cabbages he bores one to death about," added John Dell very un-

fraternally, "and he winds up by asking for my consent in a polite and gentlemanly manner, and yet I don't like it."

"You have expected it?"

"Ay, partly, partly—I don't walk through the world with my eyes shut."

He walked through the world with his eyes very much out of his head, and perhaps saw more than other people. Owen even doubted at times whether he had not seen through him—a matter of no difficulty—though Owen fancied his flimsey rags of disguise were triple-clad steel, which no suspicion could pierce.

"And it's a good match."

"Ah! I don't see so much as that," said Dell quickly; "the man being a surgeon, and of a good family, don't square it. It's a good match for him, lad."

"True."

"It's a good match for any man who can win a virtuous religious girl to himself; if he be a right-minded man, he will think it

the greatest blessing\* that can ever befall him on God's earth."

John Dell's hand smote the table heavily, and scared Owen's reverie to the outermost verge. He had never seen his friend so excited.

"I'm an old bachelor, Owen," he said more softly, as he met Owen's surprised look, "but I think so all the same. Had I come across such a girl, I would have tried to marry her years ago, and I would have been a better man. I might have had then a daughter to give away of my own, instead of this *sham!*"

"Ruth is like your daughter—there is no sham in it. She would not marry him, if you were to say 'he is unfit for you—I object.'"

"God bless her, she's a good girl. And I think, Owen, you've gone pretty near the truth, for an addle-headed lad."

"Thank you for the compliment."

"And you have *been* addling yourself

lately, and been a trouble to me, boy. I suppose she was at the bottom of it—eh?”

His great hard hand—and yet his kind fatherly hand—passed quickly over the table and pressed Owen’s arm, curbing the convulsive start which would have taken our hero from the room. It was a time to talk of it, and John Dell had seized the right time, like a cautious man as he was.

“Sit still, Owen, for a moment or two, I won’t bore you. I’ve kept it back a long while, knowing no good could follow it, but it may as well come out, now all’s over and ended. I’ve seen it all along, and wished it—but it wasn’t to be.”

“Wished it—oh, sir!”

“You were more in her sphere—you were steady and persevering, and likely to get on. You would have made her a good husband in time, and she would have led your heart aright, and made a Christian of you—which you arn’t—and, oh! Owen, which you may never be.”

“And you knew it, and didn’t think her too good for me—me, a waif from the streets!” he cried passionately.

“Don’t bellow out like that—there’s half-a-dozen boys trying to swing my front gate off its hinges, and they’ll hear you. What a place this Kennington Road is for boys!”

And as though interested in so momentous a question, he withdrew his hand from Owen’s arm, and sat and reflected upon the subject, giving time for Owen to subside again into himself.

“I daresay after to-night you and I will never talk of this again,” Dell resumed, in a manner very strange and gentle for him; “it’s a subject far from palatable, and had better die out in its own way. What I wished did not come to pass—it was God’s wish, too, and so for the best.”

“You have never given Ruth to believe that I—I——”

“No,” broke in Dell, “that would have been unfair to you, and distressed her. I



should not have spoken of it, only these kinds of disappointments change a man, and rob him sometimes of his best motives for exertion. *You're* changed."

It was the old sharp manner, and Owen felt glad of it. The new manner had pained and moved him, and the tears had been in his eyes more than once.

"Ruth will go away and have a home of her own some day," said he, "and then there's only you to look after—a rough young cub, that will be more trouble than half-a-dozen girls. You *are* changed, you know."

"You have told me so before, I—I am sorry if you think I have changed for the worse."

"I know you have," said Dell, "for you're unsettled and restless. Those young clerks don't do you any good—dash 'em!"

"They do me no harm, I think."

"It's very odd that a parcel of young men together must talk obscenity, and think

it fine talking, and so manlike," said Dell ; "it's very awful to think of the evil thoughts that slide in under cover of a jest —of the evil deeds that follow the thoughts, just as the evil seed follows the rank weed that has flowered amongst the corn. Just as—well, 'I won't preach.'"

It was John Dell's weakness, that horror of preaching. His honest nature detested cant, and he was not bold enough to be thought a canting hypocrite himself. He felt he could have done more good in his time by striking at the right moment, in the right mood, but he had left it for others less practical than himself. He would have been laughed at by those whose opinion he already thought valueless, and he had been only moved here and there, as by an impulse direct from the God whose servant he was. He was a timid man, for all his abruptness, and would not venture into the deep waters, even to save those who might be sinking down. For they sank so slowly

they might be only drifting with the stream, and there were a hundred better hands than his upon the banks to offer help and strength. It was not his profession to be continually alive to the weakness and wickedness of all passing around him. So there are men who preach too little as well as too much—who let the right time go by as well as the wrong; and so the balance in both cases swings heavily to the dark side. Perhaps there may come a time when even saving sinners may be fashionable. Grand people have started a great many out-of-the-way things in their day!

In the present instance John Dell, despite his assertion, had not quite done with our hero; he saw a chance of turning him from that abnormal state of misanthropy which Colin, who has been disappointed in Colinet, has taken to from the days of Arcadia.

“I won’t preach,” reiterated Dell, “but I won’t wind up without again hinting that

it will be the better for you to turn back to your old self. You are sliding away from it, and making for the easy, devil-may-care, fast school."

"And yet I study too hard, and don't take enough holidays!" said Owen.

"Exactly; and so there will be a reaction and a grand plunge," said Dell; "and all my hopes of seeing you a bright man will go down with you like so much lead round your neck."

Dell became excited again, and caught up Owen's cigar-case, and shivered to pieces the china medallion, with which it was ornamented, against the corner of the table.

"There, I meant to do that!" he said, pitching the case to Owen—"I hate your brazen-faced portraits of hussies who ought to have known better than sit for them; and what pleasure you or any man can take in such wretched rubbish is a puzzle to me."

"It was the quietest I could pick out of the batch."

"I'd have flung the lot at the owner's head, then," said Dell.

Owen smiled at his friend's impetuosity, and Dell took it as a good omen that the first acute pangs were recovered from. Still, parting from Owen that night, he could not forbear shaking hands with him, and looking him steadily in the face again.

"I mustn't have you change," he said. "I don't take so often to faces, that I should care to see this, lined and shadowed, and looking reckless, like so many I meet in the streets. Your disappointment is of thistle-down, and one hearty breath will puff it away!"

"Well, I'll try then."

"Look at me, and say if you think I am a puling, white-faced, lackadaisical prig, who is wasting away or piling up the horrors, because a woman wouldn't take to him."

It was a bold, grey-whiskered, slightly-lined face, without a dash of sentiment in

it. Love-troubles might have swept at it once, but they had been dashed off like the spray from an iron-bound coast.

“I don’t think you have suffered much from the tender passion, Mr. Dell.”

“I have suffered deeply, and kept my cares to myself. What you have felt is a child’s fancy; from such a disappointment as mine, may God keep every honest man free!”

The shadow of that disappointment crossed him as he spoke, and it was for a moment a face on which trouble rested and changed. Owen would have dreamed of 92’s love-troubles before John Dell’s. Dell, to his fancy, had always been hard and abrupt, and unyielding; an unfanciful child, plodding on quietly to an unfanciful manhood. And after all, he had had his heart touched by a fair face, and been crossed in love like other mortals—suffered more than most, or his truthful tongue would not have asserted so much.

Well, Owen would grow stronger—he had no fear of that. His was hardly a love-story, for the love had been all of one side, and could therefore be more easily lopped away.

Still, he was uneasy and unhappy. For his love was a pure, unselfish passion, and he had a fear that he had not owned to his companion that Ruth had chosen, or was about to choose, unwisely. He had seen but little of Glindon, but all that he had seen was distasteful, and seemed to tinge his character unfavourably.

And the shadow of such thoughts kept him wakeful at his open window, long after John Dell in the next room had dropped quietly to sleep.

## CHAPTER II.

ARTHUR GLINDON.

JOHN DELL went alone to Ansted the following evening, and saw his niece Ruth. It was a long interview, with which we do not intend to trouble the reader, and it ended satisfactorily, and with a few tears on the lady's side—natural to such interviews in general. With that frankness she had inherited from him,—she let her uncle see that Mr. Glindon had made some progress in her affections, and John Dell could but give his assent to the engagement, and add thereto as hearty a blessing upon it as though she had been his own child. He



wrote to Glindon after his return, and that gentleman called upon him at Kennington, and entered into a statement of his prospects, his family matters, and his parents; all of which we also refrain from troubling the reader with. His prospects in life will be alluded to in due course, and the parents will not make their appearance, being abroad, and intending to stay there. Suffice it to say, that Glindon's statement was satisfactory to John Dell; and revert we a little to that course of events which made lovers of the young doctor and the school-mistress.

In the first place, it had not been an easy conquest of Arthur Glindon's—Ruth Dell belonging to that staid, thoughtful class of young women, growing every day so un-beautifully less. Ruth Dell had not given much thought to the morrow or the men; whether she should be married, and who would fall in love with her, and take her to be his wedded wife. She had been brought

up quietly, and passed on her way to womanhood without having her senses distracted by what homely people call "a parcel of chaps." Undeniably a pretty girl, she had not made good looks her study, or sought to trade in them and raise a sensation with them, as young ladies of a faster order of creation do now and then. The sterner sex had not perplexed her before Glindon's appearance on the scene; she had not dressed for them, or talked at them, or invited them to her side by glances meant to be shy, or broad stares indisputably bold; she had not flirted and simpered and ogled and angled and been so prettily-fast as is—alas!—the fashion in the sad new times wherein husbands are scarce. The sad new times wherein such manners, fashionable though they be, are scaring true lovers away, and bringing the false and vapid to nothing but empty compliments—the trying grievous times for mothers of families whose daughters are on their hands

still, and whose sons are going dead against God's laws and calling it life. And when sin is looked at as a jest, and sinners are but free-livers and "horsebreakers," society is undergoing a change which is bad for it, and against which every man that thinks and feels honestly ought to protest.

Possibly because Ruth Dell was the reverse of the fashion, and made no "eyes," Arthur Glindon thought it necessary to fall in love with her. He had fallen in love with her before she was schoolmistress at Ansted, and whilst she was yet unaware that such a person as Mr. Glindon existed. He had seen her at the training-school, whither business had called him, heard of her acquirements, and been interested in her. Fortune had not been favourable in his case, and he had only found the opportunity of making her acquaintance just at the time that she escaped him and went to Ansted. His was a nature that struggled to subdue opposition, and took

not prudence into consideration when, led on to attain any object that tempted him. There was interest in the chase then, and fortune becoming more kind, rewarded his perseverance by making a vacancy for consulting surgeon at Ansted. Having obtained, by more than common energy, the appointment, he began to think perhaps it would not be prudent to fall in love too deeply with Ruth Dell. It was only an infatuation—he had been subject to such—and it would die out in good time.

He was a rising man, and she was a school-mistress; her family was objectionable, while his was a highly-respectable family, if a little poor in its way. In the second instance he had found it hard not to fall in love, and in the third he had begun to despair if Ruth would ever fall in love with him, and so gone slap-dash into the stream and struck out for her with all his energy. And he had won her, after a long struggle, after more patience than he had believed himself

possessed of, and more perseverance than he had ever bestowed on his profession. Naturally clever, he had worked his way easily upwards—had much application been necessary, he would have still been an assistant at a parish doctor's. He was astonished to find what a difference his love chase had made in him—how many extravagant habits he had laid aside for the nonce—what a many fast friends he had omitted to call upon—how the time had slipped away in going to and from Ansted, to his patients lying beyond the free school on the hill.

Not that he attended to his patients quite so regularly as he might have done; albeit if his love-matters had not lured him away, other incentives to pleasure would have caused him to wander. Glindon was not of the settling-down, stay-at-home order; if it had not been for one or two of those lucky cases which make a medical man, he would never have had much connection to

attend to. He was naturally impatient and irritable—add thereto that he was vain, and the reader knows almost as much of his character as we intend him to know in this chapter. The reader has met with him before, and is aware of one or two bad habits of his; how they will affect his history, and the tenor of more lives than his, future pages must decide.

It may be a matter of surprise that Ruth Dell should have taken to Arthur Glindon, but there are strange inconsistencies in the universal passion, and Ruth knew less of the real Arthur Glindon than the reader knows. She had seen and met often an accomplished young man, who was neither frivolous nor affected, and when business brought them not together at Ansted school, there was good Mrs. Cherbury to manœuvre without her knowledge at Oaklands. For that estimable lady was of the good old order of matchmakers, and having taken a fancy to Ruth Dell, would have moved hea-

ven and earth, had it been in her power, to find her a fitting husband. Her first idea had been to reserve Ruth for her "dear lad Isaac," but that was a sanguine dream, in which both Isaac and Ruth "fought shy." Isaac was forty-three, and seemed dead to temptation, and Ruth would have preferred a nunnery to accepting him, had the choice lain between the two. Finally Mrs. Cherbury took Mr. Glindon in hand, and nearly made his case hopeless by her interference, and by her clumsy manner of arranging meetings intended to appear chance ones; but the end made good the means, and now Ruth Dell was engaged to Mr. Glindon, and was to marry him after a year's probation.

"And the Glindons are a very nice family, my dear," said Mrs. Cherbury; "a little fussy, perhaps—but that was their way when they were in England. And we all have a way with us; and though they thought nothing of my poor Cherbury be-

cause his blood wasn't good and theirs ~~was~~ —not that I saw any difference, unless it made Cherbury more of a purple shade, as if his waistcoat was tight—yet they'll think a great deal of you for all that."

Some remarks of this kind led Ruth to inquire of Mr. Glindon whether he had communicated with his parents respecting their engagement? Yes, he had written, as a matter of course—and the reply, as a matter of course, would be favourable; but was not he old enough to be his own master? His parents did not expect him to marry an heiress—in fact, never troubled themselves about him, and were simply poor gentlefolk, living abroad for economy's sake. He was the best judge, and knew who would make him the best wife.

And Ruth blushed, and evaded his looks, and felt very happy under the circumstances. And she *was* very happy, with life at that time in its spring, and no clouds threatening. He was her



first love, and the one hero of her life. Before that time she had had ever a reputation for firmness and self-control, but she was always strangely confused now, and business matters appeared dwarfed in importance, after John Dell's consent had been added to that of her father's. Owen saw more of Arthur Glindon after the engagement—strove, for Ruth's sake and her uncle's, to be as pleasant and agreeable to the young surgeon, as the young surgeon strove on his own part. But there certainly *was* an opposing element at work, which kept them a long way apart in their hearts from each other. There were little spars of words between them when they were left together for a moment, playful satirical little thrusts at each other in arguments on passing events, that were trying to both tempers.

“He would insult me, if he dare,” thought Glindon; and “he would do me an injury, if it were in his power,” was the inward

conjecture of Owen. Both remembered too well that night of the renewal of their acquaintance, when both spoke a little too plainly and warmly. Its shadow was ever between any reciprocity of feeling between them. Owen regarded Glindon as a man who had won a prize for which he had been secretly striving, and as a man also with whom that prize could not be trusted ; and Glindon took no more readily to Owen, for his belief that they had been rivals when they met at 92's cottage, near Ansted. And if the truth must be told, Glindon, from his own elevated position, looked down a little on Owen. Owen had been a greengrocer's boy, and was still only a clerk in a factory. He would not have looked down on him if he had not given himself such airs, perhaps—and Owen did show off a little now and then, for he was human, and had his weaknesses—and he was some years Glindon's junior. It was well Glindon loved Ruth Dell with a strong man's passion, for he was contracting

*an* alliance, at which many an one in his position would have hesitated. She would grace his home, and make him a lady-like, accomplished wife; but, heavens! what a father, uncle, and friend! If he could shake off the whole of them, and take Ruth to a foreign land, how much better it would be!—there were fairer opportunities of succeeding in another country. So Arthur Glindon was an unsatisfied being, to whom the glorious unattainable was ever beyond, making him unhappy, because out of his reach. Another phase of his character you see—a strange phase, that renders him a most remarkable and out-of-the-way creature.

Surely not true to human life this Arthur Glindon, cry my readers—dear and valued friends of mine, who, like myself, are always content with the present, and have no cause to grumble at anything. Our business and profits are large enough—our friends are only a little better off—our mothers and sisters-in-law, and wife's ac-

quaintances, are all that we can wish—and our poor relations are the slightest of thorns in the plumpest of flesh. We sit composedly under our fig-tree, and have no schemes for advancement, no repinings at the poorness of the prize for which we fought so hard in times past, and no upward glances at the grapes, which seem as distant as Heaven.

## CHAPTER III.

## WHAT OWEN DID NOT EXPECT.

MR. ISAAC CHERBURY'S head not troubling its owner with its aches sufficiently to detain him from business, he was once more punctual in his attendance at the foundry, wherein his father had made much money for his widow. Isaac, as the reader is aware, had been bequeathed the business to make a fortune for himself; and early and late he was at his post in his private room, planning and corresponding enough for half a dozen men at least. He would allow himself no holiday; the unholy fever of money-getting kept him more restless than his father, and rendered

him more spare and pinched. If he had been less anxious, he would have been a handsome man; if he had bent less over his desk, he would have been more straight in the back, and some inches broader across the chest.

He had a pride in the business, but it was not the old pride of his father's—he would have worked hard for money in any shape, under any circumstances. We have seen him at the card-table with Glindon, fighting hard for a few shillings; before the great library-table, whereon so many papers were heaped, one could scarcely imagine him the same man, although it was the same passion that chained him there. Still, he did not appear one who could betray excitement, or be moved by any loss or gain—he seemed ever cold, calculating, and close. The chill of his presence stole into the counting-house, and made an ice-pit of it; and if he appeared in the workshops, the hammers seemed to ring more faintly, and the furnace burn less fierce.

And yet he was not a proud man, only one who objected to be bothered and have those ideas with which his head was full disturbed by other people's suggestions. He was taciturn in business hours, and as grim as though he had committed a murder, and was ever haunted by his victim's ghost.

He was a fair master to his men ; he gave them holidays on all legal occasions ; and in matters of dispute it was more comfortable to reason with a man who never answered than with the foreman and overlookers, who bullied so ferociously. But he was not liked much. He kept at a long distance from his servants ; he was a silent man, and, moreover, as will be presently shown, he was a suspicious one.

"Times are altered," and "the young tree is never like the old stock," were the comments expressed when he assumed the sceptre of government ; Mr. Cherbury, senior, was a pleasant, chatty, amiable old gentleman, but his successor was hard to

make out, and hid himself too much in the inner sanctum to be a favourite with a thousand and odd workmen who cared not to be estimated as so many slaves or machines.

Owen, among the rest, did not entertain any very great amount of affection for Mr. Cherbury; had, in fact, but seen very little of that gentleman, and had only received a commission now and then concerning books and papers connected with the business, couched in the briefest terms.

Some two or three months after the engagement between John Dell's niece and Mr. Glindon, when Owen, having taken Dell's words to heart, was more like his old self before love matters troubled him, a turn was given to Owen's life that was unexpected and strange.

Lives flowing on calmly and monotonously do receive these sudden "pulls up" at times; on the great chess-board, amidst the crowd of lords and ladies, blundering rooks and



Humble pawns, one must receive a check sometimes—it is the law of life, the natural sequence of mixing with the world.

Owen had many reasons for remembering *that “turn” to the last hour of his life*; when he was an older man it made him grave to think of it. Mr. Cherbury’s head had been a trifle more unmanageable than usual one morning, and Mr. Glindon had been sent for in haste, and spent half an hour with him, passing in and out of the counting-house without acknowledging the existence of a young gentleman whom he was accustomed occasionally to meet in a different sphere. Owen had not troubled himself concerning the slight, if slight it could be called. Possibly Mr. Glindon had feared disturbing him over the ledger, and thought friendly salutations in hours of business a little out of place; probably he was “stuck up,” and wanted to show off—it did not matter one way or the other to Owen. That particular morning the chief

clerk, a little wiry man who had served the Cherburys for fifty years, was sent for, after Mr. Glindon's departure, and remained with the head of the firm half an hour or more. Returning to the counting-house, he addressed our hero direct.

"Mr. Owen, Mr. Cherbury wishes a few minutes conversation with you."

"With me!" said Owen, scarcely able to realize that fact on the instant.

The head-clerk nodded, and Owen left his high stool and walked briskly towards the master's study. At the door he paused to wonder what Mr. Cherbury could possibly want with him, and had a vague idea that some important topic—such as a rise in salary—was about to ensue. Well, he had been thinking of a rise in salary lately; how agreeable it would be to swell his savings' bank account, which had remained *in statu quo* for some months, now—<sup>\*</sup>Mary Chickney's expenses becoming a little more heavy as she grew older. Buoyed up with this

pleasant thought—for he had had an unaccountable presentiment before this that something was wrong—Owen knocked at the door, and received from within a summons to enter.

Mr. Cherbury was sitting in an arm-chair by the empty fire-grate, his knees crossed, his silk handkerchief hanging over his head as a protection from flies—his whole appearance suggestive of ease. A position similar to that in which we first met him at Oaklands, and a singular position to find him in his house of business, with the letters unanswered on his desk.

“Shut the door quietly, Mr. Owen,” he said, as our hero entered, “and make sure no one’s listening outside.”

Owen complied with his request, and then advanced a few steps into the room, saying,

“I hope you are not unwell, Mr. Cherbury?”

“My head feels too big for me, that’s all. It’s the only complaint I have,” he said, in

a petulant manner, as if it were one complaint too many, and rather hard on him.

Owen stood by the library table waiting his master's pleasure.

"Mr. Glindon recommends me to keep quiet till three, so I thought in the interim I would send for you and settle that matter."

"What matter, sir?"

"Only the matter that has been troubling me the last three days—a little matter, which it may be as well to settle at once."

It was very strange, Owen thought, and his active mind went busily to work for a clue to the mystery, and could not wait for the slow explanations of Mr. Isaac Cherbury.

"I only wish you to say No and withdraw," remarked the employer.

"To say No?" repeated Owen.

"I don't believe it can be Yes, and—and I'll take your word to the contrary."

"Pray, explain, sir," said Owen, impatiently.

Mr. Cherbury appeared to have some difficulty in explaining, or having been recommended *quietness* would not put himself in a hurry. Besides, he had nearly an hour before him, the time-piece in its ebony case on the mantel-shelf stood only at a quarter past two.

“Well, then, an absurd statement has reached my ears, Mr. Owen, and I leave it for you to disprove. It can’t be true, and yet it bothers me.”

Owen felt uncomfortably tight about the chest. Relating in after years the story, he said the whole truth flashed upon him at that juncture, and paled his face and took away his breath. The dark past came nearer to him in that instant than it had done for many years. He was a waif in the streets, homeless and friendless, and ignorant only a few days ago!

“Were you ever in prison?”

Mr. Cherbury might have brought the question round with greater delicacy. His

former manner had evidently given evidence of an intention of so doing; but long statements were an abomination, and he was naturally a man of few words. It was a cruel question, that struck hard, though Owen was prepared for it—it was the long-cherished secret of his life, rent away ruthlessly. It staggered him, and he pressed more heavily his hand against the library-table to support himself. He must have changed outwardly too, for Mr. Cherbury, as if sorry at his abruptness, said in a kinder tone,

“Take your time. It is a rough question, but as your employer I am forced to put it.”

“I have been in prison, sir,” said Owen boldly.

What if in his dark estate he had been in prison a hundred times, now the evil shadows were gone and he was an honest man?

“For theft?”

“Yes.”

"And more than once?"

"Yes."

Owen answered more firmly every awkward question, and heeded not the change in Mr. Cherbury's countenance. It was growing more hard and grim than even business hours were accustomed to make it.

"I anticipated a denial of the charge, Mr. Owen. I could not suppose its confirmation."

"It is the truth, sir, I am sorry to say—it is the one secret of my life, unknown to my best friends. It all happened when I was a boy; there were no friends round me then, and the way was dark, and I was ignorant! I fought my way upwards, from the evil that might have ruined me."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so—but my father was not aware of it when he placed you here."

"Was I to blazon out my early disgrace?" cried Owen, a little warmly.

"And the head-clerk knows it now—and

—and there is a mistake in the accounts.”

“My God!”—and Owen dropped into a chair by the door, and then sprang from it again, erect and defiant.

“Not in my accounts, sir—I defy you to prove that.”

“In the accounts generally—there is a mistake somewhere of fifty pounds, and the whole books are thrown out, the head-clerk tells me.”

“I heard him speaking of it yesterday—something has forgotten to be entered, probably by the clerks—I hope, sir, you have no suspicion that I touched the money?”

“No—but—”

“But I am an honest man, and, in this new life of mine, above suspicion.”

“Who is there to suspect?—they are all honest men, Mr. Owen, young men whose families are respected and well known.”

“I say it is a mistake.”

Mr. Cherbury did not answer, and Owen,



looking very white and firm, moved a step nearer him.

“A mistake that I will find before the day’s out, Mr. Cherbury. That I will prove is an error of entry, with your permission.”

“I shall be glad if you prove it,” said Cherbury—“under the circumstances, unless it be proved—”

“Stay, if you please—when it is not proved, let me know your decision.”

Mr. Cherbury looked into the young man’s face and paused. It was a frank, face now, and the dark eyes that were bent in his direction were a trifle too much for him. He looked down, and felt a little annoyed with himself at having opened the subject so harshly; in his heart, which he seldom allowed to disturb him, there were the feelings of a gentleman. But he had not expected Owen’s avowal, though he had desired the subject to be ventilated, and there *was* a mistake in the accounts!

If he had intended a threat to be con-

veyed in his last sentence, at Owen's request he did not complete it, and Owen went back to the office, collecting his thoughts by the way. \* Seated on the high stool he put away his regular work, and had the various account books brought him, and piled up on his desk. He felt there was an error of entry somewhere, and not of his own making—had Mr. Cherbury waited till balancing-day, next week, it would have shown itself, no doubt. The error was nothing to Owen, and did not trouble him—it was the cruel thought that his past life was known, which burned at his brain and made the room swim round with him. There was an enemy lurking somewhere, against whom he must guard, and who had struck at him like a coward in the dark.

He thought of Glindon, and dismissed the thought—then he held his breath as it came back with tenfold force, and balked his discerning powers. Glindon,

of whom he had been suspicious himself; Glindon, who had been his rival, and won the only prize of life he had thought worth the having. It was all plain enough; the old policeman, *her* father, had betrayed his secret to Glindon in a loquacious moment, and the rival had made capital of it to disgrace him. Glindon had been there that very morning, and it had all followed his appearance.

And over the sheets swarming with figures Owen cursed him, and into the heart of the mortified man entered thoughts and feelings which were to narrow it for many a day forth.

Meanwhile Mr. \*Cherbury sat watching the time-piece and praying for three o'clock. He was a man who obeyed the doctor's orders to the letter, although his faith in doctor's drugs and advice was not great. He had taken a powder and left his table, whereon another postal delivery had placed a dozen unopened letters, and when he

had found a nap difficult to obtain with the hammers ringing across the yard, sought only to kill the monotony of his position by a little talk with his head clerk and Owen.

And now Owen troubled him, and increased his headache. He wished he had put off the interview with that young man, or waited a day or two to see if the missing fifty pounds were likely to turn up—this prison business had all happened when Owen was a child it seemed, and though the child is father to the man, he had heard, yet in this instance he believed he had been a trifle too hasty. Still fifty pounds was a large sum, although the chief clerk in his interview of that morning had treated the matter lightly, and merely asked if the mistake were in the cheque-book—he who drew his own cheques, and never made mistakes!

It was singular that the amount should have been missed at once, when he numbered his cash transactions by thousands of

pounds weekly—perhaps there was more than chance in it, and it was a warning to him after all.

He was very glad when three struck, and he could begin opening letters and answering them, and plunging into business again. He had satisfied his conscience by sending for the doctor—he was not going to neglect his health for anybody—and now he could set to work anew, and forget the little events that had harassed him.

A tap at the door.

“Come in.”

And Owen with a small book under his arm made his re-appearance.

He was very pale still, and having pushed his hair half-a-dozen different ways during his search for an error in the accounts, looked a trifle more wild than during the preceding interview.

“I have found the mistake, sir—it’s your own, and the head clerk’s.”

“The devil!” ejaculated Mr. Cherbury.

"You drew twenty-two cheques on Friday last — one for the workmen's wages, two thousand five hundred pounds, instead of two thousand five hundred and fifty, which sum the head clerk told you was necessary. The cash received from the bankers' was entered in the books by Mr. Simmonds as two thousand five hundred and fifty, when fifty pounds less was received. The bankers' book has just come in, and you'll find the cancelled cheque there, Mr. Simmonds says."

Owen laid the book on the desk, and Mr. Cherbury dived at it, and looked from his account to a cheque which he had drawn from the pocket.

"You're right," he muttered.

To have been robbed of a thousand pounds would have displeased him less just then. His pride was in his business accuracy, and this young man had proved him careless and slovenly, unless that Mr. Simmonds *did* ask for a cheque for two

thousand five hundred pounds. That *must* have been it, he was inclined to think. He rang for Simmonds immediately, and the head clerk came bustling into the room.

"It's your mistake, it appears, Simmonds."

"No, sir—yours."

"You did not tell me two thousand five hundred and fifty pounds?"

"I wrote in for it, sir—you were rather busy at the time."

Mr. Cherbury consulted a file of slips of paper, and scratched his head angrily at discovering Mr. Simmonds to be in the right.

"Still you counted the cash when it came from the bankers'," he said.

"Yes, sir—but I had so got it across my mind that it must be the sum for which I wrote in, that——"

"Then you had no business to get anything so foolish across your mind, sir," interrupted Mr. Cherbury, "it has led to a great unpleasantness."

"I'm very sorry, that Mr. Owen has been connected with *our* mistake, sir," said the clerk, "especially as that foolish story of——"

It was Owen's turn to interrupt.

"What! are you in the secret too?" he cried, fiercely. "Mr. Cherbury," turning to his employer, "is this gentleman aware of the subject of our last conversation?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it does not matter. It only confirms the resolution made when I was in this room an hour since. Mr. Cherbury, I ask your permission to leave your service at once."

Mr. Cherbury looked up. Mr. Simmonds ejaculated "God bless me!"

"You have not been backward in suspecting me as soon as the officious tongue of a friend told of an estate which no one can more bitterly regret than myself. Here, in your service, it is impossible to remain. You have lost confidence in me.



My fellow clerks, all with whom I may come in contact from this day forth will distrust me."

"I should like you to consider," urged Mr. Cherbury.

"I have been in prison for theft, sir," said Owen, bitterly.

Mr. Cherbury did not like his position. More than that, he was sorry for his clerk.

"I wouldn't be too hasty."

"I would not serve you again, sir, for thrice my salary," said Owen. "Your father raised me above my station, and I have not been happy in it. I will descend and seek out a new life more fitting for me. I had forgotten the old until you reminded me of it. I had hoped it was all sunk for ever. But you, your clerk, all who will hear the story now, will cry 'he was a thief,' and shrink away."

"Owen, I'm sorry it has happened," cried Mr. Cherbury.

It was a strange avowal for one usually

so grim and icy, and even the old clerk looked about him with surprise. There was human nature at the bottom of this manufacturer's heart. Passion had played there; and his generous thoughts—such as his father had had—were only dying out, not dead.

“Thank you,” said Owen, drily. “We are all sorry, I hope. You will be glad an hour or two hence that I seek to end it in this way. He who has been a thief, one must always suspect when accounts are wrong. It is the law of nature, and retributive justice on him whose hands have snatched at his neighbour's goods. I stole because I was a beggar and hungry—because I was set on by one who was hungry like myself—and because no one had taught me better. If your father had asked me years ago for this story, I would have told it him frankly, and declined his service, though I had died of shame at his feet. But I kept my secret because no one suspected me, and

I have been to your father and to you a faithful servant."

"I believe it," said Mr. Cherbury, "and for that reason I ask you to remain and——"

"Mr. Cherbury, I am going to leave you. There is no power to make me stop when such a secret as mine has once escaped. If you consider I have not been here under false pretences, I will take my salary to this day. If you have your doubts on the point, I will relinquish it."

It was Mr. Cherbury's turn to feel humiliated. He did not know why. He had acted for the best, if a little churlishly, and it had come upon him with a great surprise, this news of Owen's juvenile delinquency. Mr. Cherbury could do nothing but write a cheque, however, and in the impulse of the moment offer a sum in excess of Owen's salary—a novel kind of conscience money, for taunting his subordinate with the old sins which he had long ago lived down.

Owen tore the cheque in two, and said a little impatiently,

“Do not burden me with favours, Mr. Cherbury—let me feel independent and free. My salary is a quarter of a hundred and thirty-five pounds, minus the days between this and Michaelmas—for what I have worked I only desire to be paid.”

“Very well, very well,” said Mr. Cherbury, with a heightened colour; and, after a little calculation, a second cheque was drawn. Mr. Simmonds, troubled in his mind also, had retired by this time, and Mr. Cherbury and our hero were alone together.

“That is correct to the farthing,” said Mr. Cherbury, a little satirically; “may I trouble you for a receipt?”

“I wrote it in the office, sir,” said Owen, tendering the required document in exchange for his salary.

There seemed nothing more necessary save to retire gracefully from an awkward interview, and Owen walked slowly to the door.

"One moment, Owen," said Mr. Cherbury, who had been watching his progress across the room.

Owen faced his master once more.

"Of course what has passed is a secret between you and me and Mr. Simmonds. Of course, if I am referred to for a character, I shall speak as I found you—honest, industrious, and energetic."

"I shall not trouble you as to character, sir—you must keep something back ; and—what do you know of me, after all?"

And with this Parthian dart, Owen left the room, strode quickly along the passage to the counting-house, took his hat from the desk, nodded to his old fellow-clerks, and then went his way, full of a new resolve that, in the midst of much bitterness of spirit, kept him strong.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE PAST COMES BACK.

HE would go abroad. There were ties still that held him to England, but they were not indissoluble, and of England he was tired. It was the theatre of his early disgrace, and of all his disappointments. He was restless and unsettled; and a great change could only cure his secret despondency and his bitterness of spirit.

He would not go away for ever, but for a few years, until Mary Chickney grew up and required a stricter guardianship. What was to become of her if he stayed in London when his secret was bruited about that he

had been a thief and in prison—when the doors of honest employment closed against him one by one, and he was thrown as much on the streets as in the old days before Tarby's wife rescued him from wrong?

Owen was aggrieved, and, therefore, took a false view of things, as aggrieved persons do generally. The glass that he saw through darkly was a false medium just then, and the prospect before him was distorted. True, the tongue that betrayed his secret might whisper it again in a fresh quarter, and, if actuated by malice, wherefore should it pause? He thought of Glindon, and gnashed his teeth over his injuries; Glindon hated him, and would have no mercy, or he was an idler and a tattler, and would have no consideration.

• And yet Glindon had only spoken the truth after all; it would have been charitable to disguise it, but why should the man entertain much charity towards him. They

had been secretly at daggers drawn for some months, and possibly this humiliation was deserved on Owen's part. Glindon had had a chance of striking a blow and lost it not. So be it; his turn might come some day, to strike back with all his might! And he sat and nursed that idea, with the devil at his elbow, till half John Dell's good teachings were buried beneath the load of darker thoughts which, brooding on his wrongs, had given birth to.

John Dell came at a later hour of that day, the stormy incidents of which were not yet over, to offer him all the comfort it was in his power to afford.

"Owen," said he, entering and coming direct to our hero, "I've been talking with Mr. Cherbury."

"About me?"

"Yes."

"An unpleasant subject."

Dell might have added a remark equally unpleasant and uncomplimentary had it



been an occasion of less moment, but at that time he was grave and in earnest.

“Mr. Cherbury has told me all, I think.”

“And he who talked of keeping my secret betrays it to the only friend whose respect I would have retained,” cried Owen angrily.

“What difference does it make in me?”

“It will make a difference—the shadow of my disgrace must lie between me and you, Mr. Dell, as it lies between me and all old projects, wishes, I have formed.”

“Don’t you think I have known it all along?”

“Have you?” cried Owen, eagerly.

“Yes.”

Owen seized his hand, and wrung it in his own. He bit his lips to keep the tears from his eyes, but they would come, although his strong effort of will kept them from welling over.

“And your brother was the informant?”

“Hardly. I guessed as much in the old

Hannah Street days, from a little slip of his, and I heard the rest of the story from Mrs. Chickney."

"A sad story, Dell," said Owen, gloomily.

"Not a bit of it."

"How's that?" and Owen looked up surprised.

"I say it's a bright story, with the sun shining on it. A story of God's goodness, in rescuing you from the downward path. If it end in ingratitude, why, that makes the story sad—nothing else."

"Ingratitude to whom?"

"*The Rescuer*," said Dell solemnly.

Owen was touched, but it was with Dell's earnestness; with the fresh proof of the man's great heart, the man's intense interest in his welfare.

"Well, I am punished, Mr. Dell," said he with a faint smile; "what I have been saved from, what I was, I have been reminded of to-day."

"Is it anything so serious?"

"It is to me. It changes my life."

"Rubbish."

"I shall go abroad, and earn my living there. I'm young, strong, and able to push my way onwards."

"How easy it seems to talk of going abroad!"

"Mr. Dell, I have no other chance," said our hero; "or if I had, I can't follow it. I am a coward, and fear hearing again in my ears the cry of 'Thief.' I sinned in my youth, and the sin rises again like a ghost. Besides, I am unhappy here."

"Then go!"

• And Dell laid his hand on his shoulder as though it were a blessing, and he were wishing him God speed.

"I shall be sorry to lose you, Owen," said he, "for my lonely time is coming—my niece, and now you! And I had been thinking of a plan of setting up in a small way for myself, and making a partner of you in my enterprise."

"You will get on better without me, Mr. Dell. I am an unlucky fellow."

"We shall see," said Dell; "there's not much to grumble at yet."

"Well, perhaps I am misanthropical."

"More than likely," was the sententious response.

"And I am ungrateful, especially to you, sir. You heap on me fresh proofs of your confidence, and I am already bewildered when I look back at the old, and learn how the sins of my childhood were known to you."

"You outlived them; you began a new life, and I saw that it was in earnest. Is it taught us to turn from the sinner, when he flies from the guilt and shows by every act his repentance?"

"And Ruth—what does she know?"

"Only that you were a poor boy at Chickney's when I first saw you."

"She will know all now," groaned Owen, as he thought of Glindon.

“Should she know it, she will respect you more, knowing from what a depth you have worked your way. But I have kept your secret, and will see that my brother keeps it too.”

Owen did not answer; the secret had gone beyond Dell or his own power to stay it—too many in the world were already acquainted with it.

“You talk of going abroad; for how long?”

“Five or six years, till Mary is a woman, and requires a brother’s care,” said Owen; “she is in good hands now, and I think I may trust you to see her occasionally, and write to me all the news, and receive my remittances in her behalf. All this, if—if I don’t take her with me.”

“Better leave her where she is,” said Dell; “she will clog your first efforts, and she is safe here.”

“I will think of it—I am a trifle too bewildered at present to sketch any settled plan.

I may be walking in dream-land, for what I know of the matter."

"May you wake to a brighter life—a better one, Owen!"

"Thank you."

"What a 'thank you' and what a doleful countenance!" said Dell, with forced cheerfulness. "Do you think to make a fortune, and start in search of it with a face like Don Quixote's?"

"You must give me your advice as to the best way of setting forth in life, Mr. Dell."

"Confidence in yourself and faith in your God," was the quick answer—"There is no better advice this side of the grave. There is no—but I won't preach!"

It was the old cry, and he turned away and cut short his exordium. He could have grown eloquent then, but there was a hard expression on Owen's face, and he felt no words of his would soften his comrade at that time. Still, he did not like to leave

him with that darkling countenance; and in talking of the life to which Owen seemed to have made up his mind, a chance word might bring forward a subject on which he was anxious to dwell, for the-sake of one to whom his heart yearned as to a son.

He was anxiously watching Owen, whose reverie had become a deep and gloomy one, when a peculiar knock, heavy and clumsy, like a coal-porter's, or a street-beggar's, aroused the echoes of the house. There was nothing remarkable in a single knock in the dusk of the evening, at a house in the Kennington Road, and yet both listened attentively, and looked from one to the other.

Dell broke into a laugh.

"I think we must be two nervous old women to-night," he said.

The words had scarcely left his lips when the little maid-servant, who had responded to the summons, gave a scream from below, as something fell heavily in the passage.

Dell darted from the room, and as Owen stood on the stairs a moment afterwards, he could see him bending over something lying in the hall.

"A light, girl! a light!" he said; "keep there, Owen, and don't come blocking up the way. Keep there, I say," he repeated, with a strange fierceness; "we must have air down here."

There was a light flickering in the passage a moment afterwards, and Dell, forgetting his last injunctions, pushed the street door to before he raised the head of the prostrate figure, and looked into its face.

"Who are you, woman?—what's your name?" he asked; "whom do you want?"

"Owen," demanded a hoarse voice.

"Owen, do you know this woman?" said Dell, looking towards the stairs.

Two downward leaps brought Owen to the side of the woman, whose tangled hair he pushed lightly aside, with a hand that was struck at angrily for his pains.



It was a face he had not looked into for many years—a seared, swollen face, in which all claim to womanhood might be utterly extinguished, for any lingering trait of it that showed itself that night.

“Do you know her?” asked Dell, once more, with feverish impatience.

“Yes—she is my mother!”

## CHAPTER V.

## MOTHER !

YES, it was his mother, risen as from the awful grave of the past, and lying there to scare him. Years had not so much altered or aged her but that he recognized her, and recoiled as at his deadliest enemy.

In his time of trouble she appeared to add to his sense of desolation ; she had crossed his path in the time of the great grief that followed the better mother's death in Hannah Street, and now she lay before him, to add to his shame and mortification on a day that would be ever full of bitter memories.

He could have no love for her, or feel no

pleasure in the knowledge that she lived; she only lay there a reproach, a witness to how low a woman lost to right can fall. He felt as if his life were cursed, and that no good could come to him from such a parentage; from so much evil must spring evil in its turn!

*Owen might well have some such morbid thoughts to look upon her then—so utter a wreck of all that was fair and womanly had been cast at his feet. Shadows had flitted by him in the dark crowded streets at times—shadows of lost, benighted women, like unto this—but he had feared to face them, glance towards them, and now this one had tracked him out and claimed him, and was at his feet in John Dell's house.*

There was little change in her, he thought, since the day they went to Markshire together—since he lay down to sleep in Jack Archer's tent on the Downs, and she had cursed him for a pig-headed, drowsy brute, who wouldn't stop awake to amuse

her. She was sitting half crouched against the wall, and half against John Dell's knees, fighting hard for a clear perception of things, which had been slightly disarranged by her fall, and Owen shuddered to think how like she was to the old grim past that had grown unreal and dream-like to him until then.

The same torn plaid shawl that had caught in every nail and splinter until it seemed impossible to rend again, seemed half hanging from her shoulders and half trailing on the floor; the battered old straw bonnet might be the one she had flung at him in excited moments, and jumped upon and torn at with her teeth; and the remnants of the dress huddled round her she surely wore when he was as ragged and neglected as herself. Owen had felt long since that if she ever came back to disgrace him she would come back like this; he had seen her fifty times in his dreams, as ragged, forlorn, depraved, and drunken as in that moment. The one difference that he had not thought

of was in her dishonoured grey hairs, which her hand kept feebly pushing back from her face and trying to tuck into her bonnet, as she sat there a woman whom Owen might have been pardoned for wishing she might die and end his shame there.

"You can go downstairs," said Dell, taking the light from the maid-servant, who, after another amazed look at the scene, disappeared to the lower regions.

"Can you walk now?" asked Dell, leaning over the woman.

She regarded her questioner vacantly for some moments, and then made a scramble to regain her feet, clutching at the wall and John Dell's legs.

"Lean on me," said Owen sternly, and the woman's hand was drawn within his arm, and they were standing side by side, mother and son.

"Mr. Dell, may I ask room for my mother in your house a little while?"

"Is there any need to ask it of me, Owen?"

“You are very good—but—but this woman is such a disgrace to you.”

“Neither to you nor to me,” said Dell, shortly; “we have no share in it. God knows, it has been no fault of ours.”

Owen’s mother suffered herself to be led into the little parlour, and carefully deposited in an arm-chair, where her chances of falling were only limited to a forward direction, against which contingency Owen and Dell, sitting near her, were prepared.

So much prepared, that the woman took it as an insult to her powers of self-command, and looked angrily from one to the other.

“What are you sitting like that for, both of you?” she said; “don’t you think I have taken ca—care enough of myself in my time, to forget what’s all proper and straight? You needn’t fear me coming on the fender—I never hurt myself.”

“Do you know me?” asked Owen.

The woman took both hands to her hair

this time, and pushed it back a tangled mass behind her ears. Owen drew his breath with horror. No, no, never in his dreams had such a face as that been bent so close to scare him! Drink-swollen, smeared with dirt, grazed and bleeding from some fall on the kerb-stones without—it was more like the face of a witch than a woman's.

“So you're Owen, I suppose?”

“I am Owen—your son.”

“Don't call me son, jacka—napes,” she said contemptuously; “I throw you off and disown you—you've never been a credit to me and my bringings up. You began to thieve before you could speak plain—you did.”

“What do you want here?”

“What do I want here!” repeated she; “well, I want to see you. Haven't I a mother's feelings?” she cried, changing her insolent tone to a low whine; “haven't I been put upon enough and ground down enough, that after all these heaps of years

I'm asked by my own boy what I want here. Oh, how thirsty I am ! ”

“Dell, will you leave us ? ”

Dell seemed to hesitate, once turned to the woman as if to address her, then rose and went out of the room, running one hand after the other through his bushy hair.

“What can I want but help, do you think ? ” she said ; “ you're my son and have money, and I have been a beggar in the streets for thirteen years, or locked up in a workus or a prison. I'd rather die in a prison than a workus,” she said reflectively ; “ there's more meat and less slop—not that I care much for eating, my child. Oh ! how thirsty I am ! God bless you—how you've grown ! ”

The woman's moods were variable, but of all of them Owen recoiled at any evidence of affection. He felt how false and unreal it was, and that the words were a mockery, which chilled him. Her hot hand had fallen on his, and he had drawn his hand hastily away and frowned.



“Oh! the airs of my gentleman,” said she, taking up the contemptuous vein again; “mustn’t be touched by his—hic—own mother, because she hasn’t washed since Friday. Because he’s a swell, and wears fine black clothes, and goes to office, and lives in a grand house, and, and—Owen, for the Lord Almighty’s sake, lend us one-and-six-pence!”

Her claw-like hand clutched at the sleeve of his coat, and he made no attempt to shake it off a second time. Let it rest there—it was the hand of a mother!

“I will give you money to-morrow—when you are sensible,” said Owen; “sit still now and keep quiet.”

“I was always a wild one,” with a short laugh; “I’ve had rare fun in my time—I shall only be quiet in my grave.”

“How did you find me out?” asked Owen, anxious to change the subject.

“I’ve had my eye on you—off and on you—for a long time. I knew where you

were—and you saved me a mite of trouble and harass, and weren't any longer an expense to me for board and lodging, and—and education. I was locked up for a couple of years after that, and then I—oh! how thirsty I am!—then I missed you, and then I found you, and then I was locked up again, and at last it has struck me you could help me with a bit of money.”

“It has been a long while striking you.”

“No, it hasn't,” she said quickly, “but I had always a proper spirit, and I thought I wouldn't come near you; and I've been locked up so much, you see. Now, about the eighteenpence?”

“To-morrow—to-morrow.”

“Ah! that's what the man says in the play—but you don't get over me with your to-morrow—I'm too old a bird now. I was ruined with that promise, Owen—by God!”

“In that God's name, cease!” cried Owen, vehemently.

"Get us something to drink, then—I'm so cursed thirsty."

Dell entered at this juncture with a cup of strong tea, and the woman would have fallen out of the chair in her eagerness to rise, *had not Owen's strong arm retained her in her place.*

"Here—drink this," said Dell.

The cup clattered in the saucer beneath the woman's trembling hand, and her teeth rattled against the edge of the cup for a moment or two before she tossed the tea down her throat, in true dram-drinker's fashion.

"Ah! it's poor stuff!" was her ungrateful remark, as Dell took the cup from her and placed it on the table.

"It will clear your head a bit," quietly remarked Dell.

"I like it muddled."

"Well, it's a matter of taste," was the response, *There was no humour intended, for Dell was very stern that night, but the*

woman laughed at the remark, and it was a shrill discordant evidence of hilarity, that froze them both.

“A muddled head’s good for some complaints—Lord bless you, it wouldn’t do for me to think, if I—I wanted to steer clear of that Bedlam place at the back here. Why, I’m often a mind to drown myself as it is, and—” in a husky whisper, as she turned her bloodshot eyes on Owen, “I’ve been awfully near it once or twice.”

Owen did not answer. He looked so troubled, so perplexed, as to what was to become of <sup>his</sup> woman, that Dell stepped forward to the rescue.

“You will stay here to-night,” said he, addressing her in his usual abrupt way.

“I don’t care about it,” was the response; “if Owen ’ll give me a little money, I’ll—”

“You’ll stay here to-night,” interrupted Dell, more sharply.

The woman started, and looked more in-

tently at him who had thus imperatively expressed his opinion. So intently, with her hands on the arms of the chair, as if she were about to make an effort to raise herself by them, that Dell turned away and made a feint of shifting the cup and saucer from the table to the mantel-piece.

"Mr. Dell, I can't think of this," said our hero.

"Owen, it's no trouble. There's a spare bed, and she mustn't venture into the streets to-night. Remember who this woman is, with all her sins and weakness."

"I would not turn her out—but——"

"But don't think of me. What trouble is it to me, do you think, Owen? She is your mother—you must not cast her away."

He was strangely excited; Owen could see that he was trembling as he turned to look at her once more. She was sitting in the same position, with a hand on each arm of the chair, and her wild eyes glaring at him.

Dell met her steadfast looks this time, and she gasped forth—

“You are John Dell, of Markshire?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! that’s *funny* now—to think, after all these years, that——”

“Not a word more now,” said Dell, sternly; “you are not fit to talk—I am not fit to listen. It is a cruel day for you and me—a cruel meeting; and I ask you, if you have any power to comprehend, to say no more at this time.”

“I am quiet,” murmured the woman.

“The servant is waiting outside to see you to bed,” said Dell; “shall Owen or I assist you upstairs?”

“I think I’ll take the boy’s arm,” she said; “I’m a trifle loosish on the legs still.”

Owen offered her his arm, and rising, and leaning heavily upon it, she and her son went from the room. She was silent all that slow, weary way upstairs, and Owen

made no attempt to break the stillness. The servant was waiting in the room, into which she stumbled.

"You can go," said the mother to her.

"But I'm not to leave you until——"

"I shall lie down on the bed," said she ;  
"I haven't undressed for six weeks, and I ain't a-going to begin now for anybody, and tear my things worse than they are."

"Take away the light," said Owen ; and the maid-servant, glad to be so soon rid of her charge, complied, and hurried down stairs. There was a full moon that night, and the room was far from dark after the maid-servant had withdrawn. The woman appeared not to notice the difference, but flung herself on the bed face-foremost, and told Owen somewhat roughly to leave her.

"I shall see you in the morning, mother."

"Oh ! yes."

"Is there anything I can do for you before I go?"

"Nothing."

OWEN.

"Good night, then."

"Good night."

Owen softly closed the door and went down half-a-dozen stairs, then paused. He fancied that she called him, then that she was sobbing in her room. He went back and pushed open the door.

He could see her dark figure on the bed still. She had changed her position somewhat, and was lying with her two arms stretched above her head and her hands clasped. He was right in his second surmise, too—she was sobbing and moaning extravagantly, although amidst her wild abandonment of grief there were the germs of real agony, such as she had not felt for many a long day.

"Mother, what is it?—are you ill?"

"Shut the door—shut the door, and don't trouble me!" she cried; "it is nothing to do with you, or the likes of you, what I am making myself a fool about. It's only a mad freak—and I'm raving mad with drink!"



Owen quitted her reluctantly, and descended the stairs to the room in which he had left John Dell. He found that true friend sitting at the table, with his elbow thereon, and his square chin clutched in his hand. The weight of a great care was on him—it seemed to have already lined his face and aged it.

“Come and sit here, Owen—this is a strange night for both of us.”

“For both?”

“Ay!—you must have seen and noticed that I am not myself—that your mother and I are creatures of the past, who have had thoughts and wishes in common, and on whom the world was hard. On her especially—for, good God, to what a depth she has fallen!”

“You knew her before?”

“Long before—when she was a young woman, and you were not born, to add to her cruel shame. Owen, lad, I thought once that she would have been my wife!”

## CHAPTER VI.

## "THE OLD STORY."

JOHN DELL and Owen were silent for some time after the shock of the revelation. It had been a struggle to confess; it had been a painful shock for Owen to listen to such news. Owen could understand all that had been a mystery to him; all the inner depths of Dell's character that had perplexed him were, by his own words, brought to light.

"From such a disappointment as mine, may God keep every honest man free," he had said, in speaking of his own griefs to Owen; and Owen knew then what a child-

like trouble his had been, in comparison to his old friend's.

"There's nothing new in the story, Owen," he said, after a long pause; "it's an old story, though you might have doubted my connection with it; it's the story that happens every day. They would be cruel statistics if the numbers who fall away from right could be estimated with our births and deaths—the birth of the new sin, and the awful moral death which makes life a mockery must happen fifty times a day to crowd our streets with suffering, reckless women. What a leprosy must exist under the fair mask of outward appearance to work such evil, Owen?"

"It is an evil world, and there's no justice in it."

"Hush! lad—that's wrong."

"You are of greater faith, Mr. Dell," said Owen, bitterly; "but what comfort has it brought you?"

"Comfort that the world can't take away,

Owen," returned Dell; "it's a sad moment with me now, but it does not shake my faith in God, or his mercies. Why do you sneer?"

"Pardon me, I was wrong. And I am in a dark, desperate mood, when I would sting my best friend."

"Well, the friend forgives you."

"Will you tell me of my mother? I do not ask you for details, but for any fragments of her mis-spent life that will touch my heart, and teach me charity towards her."

"What her life has been, God knows," said Dell; "when I first knew her—when I saw her last—she was a young, fair woman. Wondrously fair, people thought her at that time; a little vain of her looks, and more fond of admiration than was good for her. I was an apprentice then—just out of my time—and she was a year or two my senior. I loved her, I told her so frankly, and she was to wait for me two years, till I could work upwards to a home

for both. It was a settled engagement between us, and having faith in her, I had no more fear of losing her than I had of losing my life. I put my whole trust in her, and I had patience to wait. It was a happy time enough, with a fair prospect beyond, and it lasted eighteen months, and then I went away for a quarter of a year on business of my employer's. The night before I left Markshire was the last time I ever saw her until now. I was coming back to marry her, when they told me she had left home, mother and friends."

Owen groaned.

"So the old story, as I said, and the old end to it. I could guess it all when first stung by my disappointment. I see it realized to-night."

He was silent for a moment, then he said, quickly,

"But shall this be the end? May it not be willed otherwise, Owen? She is under my roof, and you are her son."

“What is a son’s duty in this instance?” was the gloomy rejoinder.

“Ask your own heart?” said Dell, as he leaped from his chair, and left the room precipitately.

But Owen’s heart was troubled, and before him, and around him, was confusion. What could be his duty to one who had ever neglected a mother’s duty to him? He could give her money, which she would spend in drink; but he could not feign affection, or expect affection from her. He could not talk religion to her, for he had no faith in religion himself, and was every day becoming more hard and sceptical. Of her life and character he had had more experience than John Dell, and he believed the case a vain and hopeless one. Had he but the simple faith of Ruth’s uncle, he might have prayed for strength to undertake a task of reformation.

Owen sat up that night, despite the exhortations of John Dell. He had a fear that

his mother would steal down at a later hour and rob the place, or, at all events, attempt to leave the house. And he had a strange desire to see her again—this erring mother, whose name he had never borne.

The next day was Sunday, and Owen's mother made not an early appearance down-stairs. John Dell departed for church; the servant carried the woman up some breakfast, the liquid portion of which she drank, and the solids of which were put outside the door, along with her breakfast tray, into which Owen trod, in going up-stairs, half an hour afterwards.

"Mother," he cried, knocking softly at the door—"will you come down-stairs now? I wish to speak to you."

"Not now—presently."

"Will you open your door?" said Owen, after trying it, and finding it locked on the inside.

"I will come down soon—don't worry me."

Later in the day, when John Dell had

returned, she came slowly down-stairs, walked into the room wherein they sat, and looked from one to the other, half-nervously, half-defiantly.

“I am sober now,” she said; “shall I go away?”

“Sit down, please,” returned Dell.

She sat down in the chair of yesternight, and put her bonnet at her feet, ready to be snatched up at any moment. It was a wan face in the broad daylight. The eyes were sunk deep in the head, and the lines and scars were numberless. She had made some faint attempt to present a more reputable appearance; her hair was arranged with some degree of order; and she had pinned a smart pink bow, that she had found on the dressing-table, and which was the servant's property, on to the tattered bosom of her dress, where it shone out in glaring contrast, and roused the bile of the maid, who came in at this juncture to lay the dinner-cloth.



"In a moment or two, Jane," said Dell; and Jane, with another glance at her bow, to make quite sure that so cool an appropriation was not a dream, went out of the room, looking daggers.

"Do you think you are able to hear reason now?" asked Dell.

"I don't know—I don't want to hear it," said the woman, morosely. "What good has hearing reason ever done me?"

"Not much; but still you have come hither, and your son is anxious concerning you."

"Is he?" with a glance at Owen.

"Yes," answered Owen.

"I wish I had dropped down dead before I had entered the house," said the woman. "It was only drink that brought me here at last. Sober, and I've kept away and starved or stolen rather than come near him,—knowing what a wretch I was."

"You have done this?" asked Owen, with more interest.

"Why shouldn't I own it," she replied. "It's to my credit, and there isn't much of that which falls to my share. You were getting on in the world, and I didn't see why I should spoil your chance by my ugly self. I wasn't going to sponge on you at any rate."

She was not wholly bad then! Here was a fitful gleam passing athwart her rugged nature, and the son's heart, only waiting for one sign, yearned to help her.

"When I'm drunk I'm mad. Wasn't I mad last night, John Dell?"

"Possibly."

"To think of coming here and meeting you. Ain't the times changed since you and I were sweethearts!"

The woman shuddered as she spoke, although she feigned to make light of it, by indulging in a hideous little laugh.

"You don't want to talk of that time," said Dell. "It's past."

"I only want to do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Drown myself."

Owen remembered the old threat. When he was a boy she was always asserting her intention to perpetrate that act, and the habit had not left her. And she had wished it many years, and more than once had stood at the river's brink meditating what sort of death it would be, and ever recoiling from the mysterious Afterwards, and going back heart-sick and desperate to the life which was a horror and a shame.

"You are reckless and foolish."

"True enough, John. Wasn't I so when I knew you and played you false? Shan't I be so to the end?"

"Unless God soften you."

"Oh! you were always a bit of a parson, John," said she, "and that set me against you first. You were too steady and good for me, who was a flighty one. I—I think I'll go now."

"Where?" asked Dell.

"Anywhere. I've no home just at present."

"Don't you ever think of turning back—doing better?" said Dell, eagerly.

"My God!—*me!*"

"Yes—you."

"Where's the chance—where's the likes of such a thing?" she cried. "Isn't every man's hand against me? Wasn't it too late years ago?"

"No!" cried Dell. "And it is not too late now—it can never be too late to say, 'Father, I have sinned. Have mercy on me.' Margaret, won't you make some effort now?"

"What's it to end in?"

"Salvation! Is it worth nothing?"

"I don't know. You're talking awfully! Oh, what a fool I was ever to come here!"

"Mother, will you trust to me?" cried Owen, with excitement. "In the years that have parted us I have learned to live better, and become an honest man. Will

you be the true and honest mother of that man in the years that are left you? I am going abroad, to begin a new life. Will you share it with me, and begin anew also?"

The woman gave one terrified look from one to the other, and then covered her face with her hands. She could have met reproaches, curses, anything better than kind words. They were new to her, and unnerved her.

She dropped her hands, and there were signs of tears upon her face. Even in that short time Owen fancied the face was more softened and womanly.

"It's only the drink," said she, as if to defend her weakness. "I was crying drunk last night, and it hasn't all worked off yet. I'm bothered with this talk of you both. It don't seem natural—it can't be true."

"Will you think of my offer?" said Owen. "Will you try and reflect what good it may do you and me?"

\*"And you—why you?"

"By showing me that the mother who deserted me years ago is not all bad—that she is strong enough to make one effort to turn from the evil of her ways."

"The best thing I ever did was to desert you; the worst I could ever do, would be to come back and call you son. I'm sober now, and know what I'm about. Don't let us have any more of it. You can't mean it—*it's a spurt.*"

"Try me."

And in the new hope lying before him, Owen felt strong again, though the days were early yet in which to acknowledge it. The woman looked wistfully at him—he was her child, and in her way, perhaps, she had loved him. If she could only keep sober, and feel always as she did just then, she might teach herself to worship him. For he had offered her new life, and new life to her—what did it mean?

"P'raps going abroad is better than drowning," she said, after a little reflection.

"Will you have your dinner, you two, and let me go up-stairs again to think it over?"

"Will you not—" began Dell.

"I'll not touch bit or sup to-day," she cried, tetchily; "you can't do better than leave me to myself."

Dell and Owen were of the same opinion, and made no further effort to stay her. When she had gone, they ate their dinner gravely and silently, or rather made a pretence of eating, for both hearts were full. When the cloth was removed, Dell said:

"You have made a great offer, Owen—do you flinch yet from such an undertaking?"

"Do I look as if I were flinching?"

"No; but I cannot think you have weighed all the consequences of this step."

"If I can but save her from herself!"

"You may do it—it is not impossible. Backed by a true religious feeling, it may be done; devoid of confidence in your God, and having trust but in yourself, you will fail."

“Still, I will try.”

“You are stubborn, Owen; but I think your heart is softening. Should it not change now, it never will.”

“I may be more a Christian—I may have your great and trusting faith, if my mother be spared to live a better life, and not become my lasting shame.”

“Ah! I see now; it’s all pride, not charity. And you would drive a bargain with your God, as though He were a pedlar?”.

“I’m thinking of my mother’s welfare.”

“Partly,” was the dry response.

An hour afterwards, and Owen’s mother returned. The pink bow had been replaced on the dressing-table, and her dress and grey hair had been once more re-arranged.

“Owen, you’re a kind young man. I’ve thought it all over, and I’m going to grow such a good one. All of a sudden, like the people in penny tracts.”

“Well?”

“I’ll go abroad, and you must find me a



place out there—perhaps I'll be your house-keeper, if you won't tell anybody I'm your mother. While I'm here I can't live with you or *him*,"—glancing towards Dell—"you must find me a room, till your ready to start."

"And I can trust you then?"

"Yes, yes," with a nervous look in his direction; "I think you can trust me, but I'm very weak."

"Courage!" said Dell.

A text was on his lips, but he had preached too much that day, he was inclined to think, and the woman, during the last few moments, had appeared to shrink from him. He was too cold and stern in his manner, perhaps, and she could not forget how she had wronged him in the early days, when his heart was young. Still, he bore her no malice; and he was anxious to tell her that all had long since been forgiven; that it was part of the duty of his daily life to forgive all trespasses against him.

He wanted a long talk with Owen; he saw Owen was excited, and unlike himself; he felt a few words at that time might be of service to the lad. And amidst it all there was a doubt of Owen's mother's stability of purpose. The change had been too sudden, was one of impulse, showed too little of mortification of spirit. The good at the bottom of every one's heart had been evinced that day, escaping from the murky depths to God's daylight; but the depths were there still, and the ascent was steep. Owen would trust to himself and his strong will; he would not believe in God's power to work a change, till the change had been worked by his own hand. He had no confidence in religion aiding him in the great, difficult task of reforming one who had sinned before he was born, and fallen deeper, deeper, with every year of his after-life. He would be religious presently—for then he would be grateful; forgetting that for all the ~~past gifts~~ he had evinced but

little gratitude, and thinking not how he had turned and grown callous under trials which, in comparison with those lying beyond, were only snow-flakes in the sunshine.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE FIRST PARTING.

ONE swallow makes not a summer, and one impulsive leap to a purer moral atmosphere constitutes not a repentance. There are sudden changes in the nature of things evil to things good, but they are the exceptions to the rule ; from the darkness to the light is an ascent, and not to be made by one step. The natural craving for new life must be followed by the earnest purpose to fight upwards and deserve it—they are strewing the way now, those good resolutions, those efforts to live better, with which we set out on our journey!

Owen's mother had been touched by kind words when she had least expected them, and the interest of the son in her had awakened thoughts and feelings that had slumbered since her girlhood. Yes, she would turn at the eleventh hour, and enter on her new existence, and be her son's housekeeper, slave, anything to escape from the dangers which beset her. She was poor, and in rags, and food and drink were uncertainties with her; the workhouse she abhorred, and though there was better fare at the prisons, yet they cut her hair and made her pick coir there, spoiling her personal appearance, and wearying her to death with monotonous labour. It would be better to be taken care of by a son who was going abroad—that handsome boy, who had grown up such a blessed credit to her!

These were not her first thoughts, but her second. There was a new series, a third to follow, but of that we shall speak in its

place. The first thoughts were shame and repentance, the second were of expediency. She saw what was best for her and accepted it, and even made more than a single effort to deserve her son's kindness and faith. But she was not happy, and did not feel as if she ever should be—it was very hard upon her!

Owen, whose heart was in his work, did his best to keep her strong; his absence from his old post placed the greater part of his time at her disposal, and he spent it in talking of their life together in the new world wherein neither of them would be known. If she would not be happy with him, she might obtain a place abroad, or he might set her up in some little business—there was nothing done without a trial, he assured her. He told the story of his own progress from an estate as shadowy as hers; but she was growing old in years, and could not wait so long to earn the respect of honest folk. His perseverance chilled

her—she was afraid he would expect too much from her. And kind as he was in his way, yet he was a grave, stern young man take him all together, and if she stumbled on her path she was certain he would have no mercy.

“I put my trust in you, mother—do not abuse it. I link the honest name I have earned with your own—do not cast it back to its first disgrace by letting me sink with you. I am jealous of your welfare now, for it is my own.”

She could scarcely understand him, but she felt he would not pardon her again—that this was her first and last chance, and he would be of iron if she let it slip. She was proud of him—in her own way she was learning to love him—but she was afraid of him. Had Owen been a religious man the end of all this might have been more assuring, but he was waiting to be religious. John Dell was right—Owen would drive a bargain with his Maker. He

would form his own narrow estimate of God's mercy by his mother's actions—if she repented he would follow God, and if she swerved he would be a sceptic to the end. A Christian out of gratitude, or a man of the world, worldly, in defiance of Him who had been so hard and relentless! This was the agreement he had drawn out for himself, though he scarcely knew it—though he might have shuddered had the articles been put before him as we have put them to our readers.

John Dell worked on a different principle, but his power was less, and he saw less of the patient. More than that, Owen's mother objected extremely to John Dell's appearance—it was from the better days, wherein she had been innocent and pure. Dell's presence was ever a reproach, and she could not bear it; every moment she feared he would speak of the past, and crush her with the horror of its retrospect. He talked to her of God's mercy—of the change in



her, for which she ought to be thankful, and pray for strength to proceed—but she was ever thinking of their old relations to each other, and how cruelly she had wronged him. It was kind of him, but she could not bear to hear the sound of his voice—and if Owen did not preach to her about her sins, and her duty to seek forgiveness for them by prayer and supplication, why couldn't *he* leave her for a little while, until she had grown stronger. She expressed as much one day, crying and wringing her hands, and John Dell wavered. He had alarmed her by speaking of her present awful position, and perhaps he was too precipitate,—he had never had confidence in too much preaching. When he should have persevered most, he halted. When he had touched her heart and made her wince, he turned away and let the iron cool and harden. He would wait a better opportunity—for he would not neglect his chance

here—and the opportunity to both their lives never again came back.

Concerning that past life to which she dreaded John Dell's allusions, Owen spoke one day.

"My life, which is yours, is a mystery. My right name I have never borne or known. The fate that parted you from a man who would have made your future bright, and cast you down so utterly, I have a right to know."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't go on like that!" she cried.

"I must know all, mother," said Owen, firmly.

"It's all over and past. No good can come of it; and if it drives me mad to think about, what do you expect talking will do?" she asked, with almost her old surliness.

"Place confidence between us," said Owen, quietly.

"You're down upon me too much."

"No, I am not," answered Owen; "I am but fair and open, and wish the same in return. Take your own time, but sooner or later you *must* tell me all."

"Some day, then," said the woman, *catching eagerly at a postponement*; "some day, Owen dear. But think what a poor weak woman I am just now."

Owen put off the evil day; and his mother, who had taken the name of Owen, and would answer to no other name, breathed freer in consequence.

Owen was not living with John Dell at that time; he had rented a sitting-room and two bed-rooms in a street near his old friend's house. If any fresh disgrace were to accrue, John Dell should not share it, and all the credit of raising his mother upwards must be his own. It was his duty, and he was jealous of interference. Even to those visits of Dell, to which we have already alluded, he had at that time almost his mother's distaste. Owen worked hard

for his one great object, and was gratified by witnessing some improvement. Differently dressed, his mother was a different woman, and the face, hard and stony still, was not, however, the bruised, distorted countenance which the light had fallen on in John Dell's passage. He trusted her with money for his house-keeping, and she abused not his trust; he had interdicted drink the first day of their reunion, and she had obeyed him implicitly. Still she was dull and thoughtful—at times restless—and Owen, feeling it would be better for both to leave England as early as possible, hastened his preparations for departure. •

It was all accomplished at last—his own and his mother's outfit, their passage booked in an Australian vessel, and but three more days to be spent on English soil. In those three days there were leave-takings to occur, and arrangements to make with Mrs. Cutchfield and John Dell concerning Mary, his ward.

The coming parting with Mary troubled him most. At times he felt as if he were breaking a promise made to a dying woman, by leaving the child alone in England.

"You can't take her with you, Owen," reasoned Dell; "you have no settled home, and you are too young a guardian. Your mother, too—you will pardon me—is not a fit companion for her, however much she may have reformed."

"You are right."

"And you are not going away for ever."

"I shall return in six years."

"God willing," added John Dell.

"In six years I will have stepped forward or sunk," said Owen, not heeding his friend's remark; "if I come back a rich man I will accept that partnership you offered one day. That is," he added, "if you are of the same mind."

"Always the same mind with the same old friend."

And the two men shook hands with tears in their eyes.

“And poor Mary,” said Owen, reverting to the subject which troubled him most; “you must see after her, Mr. Dell. Keep the secret of her father’s life from her, write me all the news concerning her—we shall correspond very often—and rely on my punctual remittances.”

“Ruth will see to her, Owen; Ansted is not far away from her.”

“Ruth will marry and leave Ansted long before I return,” said Owen.

“True—I had forgotten.”

“And I had almost forgotten there is Ruth to part with too,” added Owen.

He had forgotten nothing of the kind, but it was his pleasure to think so, and Dell did not consider it worth while to express his doubts of the fact. The last day Dell and Owen went together to Ansted, or rather to the little cottage on the Ansted Road, where 92 imitated Cincinnatus and

abjured the cares of state, and had a little advantage over the Roman, in possessing a quarterly pension from Government sources. 92. was at his old work of gardening as his brother and Owen came towards the cottage, and Owen's quick glance assured him that Ruth had not arrived yet. It was Wednesday afternoon, half-holiday, and there had been plenty of time to reach the cottage from the school, our hero thought a little bitterly. It might be their last meeting, and she might have shown some alacrity under the circumstances. And yet why should she hasten on her way to meet *him*?

"So you're off to forrin' parts, Owen Owen?" said 92, after the usual greeting. "Fortune-hunting and wife-hunting, p'r'aps, and such like things. Well, you're a young man, and I wish I was you."

92 heaved so deep a sigh, that Dell broke in with his old abruptness:

"Why, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing much," said 92, evading his

brother's eyes, which seemed inclined at that juncture to leap out of their owner's head towards him; "only things is a little dull here, and I've been used to active life."

"You're too old for active life," said Dell.

"I'm too old for the service, John, if you mean that," said 92; "I couldn't stand the night work, or a Lower Marsh beat, or anything of that kind. But it's dull work here, always unbuttoned."

John Dell laughed, and 92 resented it.

"You've a hactive mind, John," said he, "and ought to understand my contigimies better. You wouldn't like to be always stuck amongst cabbages that never come to a heart, but run up to seed, or get milled—would you'd like to be a-stirring."

"It's a life a little monotonous, no doubt."

"Never mind what it is," said 92; "it's what I don't take to a great deal. It's really



too much unbuttonment, John, upon my word. If I had the capital I'd go into business, or into partnership with some one who'd do the activity part while I went on with the head-work. See?"

"I see," said John, who was disgusted at the general discontent pervading the species to which he belonged. Yesterday Owen—to-day a brother with gouty feet talking of change. He should be thinking of change himself next. What a world it was!

Owen wandered restlessly about the garden whilst the brothers talked. He had but a couple of hours to spend at this cottage before he went on to break the news to Mary and Mrs. Cutchfield, who, for reasons of his own, had been kept in the dark till the last. Only two hours, and Ruth Dell had not come yet! He did not care for her now—she was another's, and he had long since given up caring for her—but he would have liked to have seen her and

talked to her before that last parting; it might have been a pleasant retrospect some day—who could tell?

He walked to the gate and looked anxiously up the road, along which, one moonlight night, he had watched the receding figure of Arthur Glindon. Glindon!—ah! may the name be accursed! No, no—God forgive him—he did not mean that; for there would come a time when Ruth would bear that name—and he wished her every health and happiness.

And as he watched she came down that road—not alone, but with him he felt he hated, and ever should hate. The opposing element leaped within him, and he had made more than one effort to check it, notwithstanding. He did not check it, then, for he had not wished to see the man. He will be a shadow on this final meeting, thought Owen—he will be ever associated with it in my mind. Could she not for once have spared me, spared herself, his company!

When they had entered the garden, and the usual formal bow had taken place between Glindon and our hero, Ruth laid her hand on his arm and led our hero away. It was the first time that she had done so of her own free will, and his heart thrilled.

"You are going away for many years I hear, Owen," she said; "I am sorry."

"Thank you," responded Owen; "it is pleasant to hear our old friends express regret at separation."

"And you are so old a friend—have been a son to my uncle, and a brother to me. For how many years do you think of leaving England?"

"Six."

"A long period. Where shall we all be, and what positions shall we occupy, six years hence? Oh! dear, what a time it is!" And she sighed, and looked thoughtfully downwards.

Owen watched her narrowly. She was

more grave than ordinary, he thought ; more grave than his coming absence from England warranted. Had she begun to doubt her future that she spoke of six years hence so sorrowfully ?

“ I hope to return and find you happy, Ruth—as happy a wife and mother as you deserve to be.”

“ I know I have your best wishes for my welfare—you will believe that you have mine ?”

“ With all my heart.”

Owen and Ruth strolled on together alone. 92's garden ground was pretty extensive, and they chose the end paths, away from the brothers Dell and Mr. Glindon, standing in a group near the cottage, with Mr. Glindon glancing at them now and then from under his hat. Owen had already seen these glances and taken no heed, or rather, on the contrary, taken a little satisfaction to himself in being in Glindon's place, and arousing no small degree of jea-

lous feeling. Anything that pained Glindon must of necessity be a satisfaction to Owen, it seemed—it was the rule governing opposing elements. However, Owen had soon forgotten Glindon's existence in his interest in Ruth Dell, and Ruth was eloquent and earnest that day. He had divined by that time the object of her leading him away from her friends; and he listened to words that from any one else in the world he would have closed his ears and heart, too.

For Ruth Dell, a fair judge of human nature for one so young and with so little worldly experience—as will be seen as we go further up the stream—had also remarked those principal traits in Owen's character which tended so much to narrow it, and deceive him. They had been children together—sister and brother as she termed it—and her interest in Owen was not small. Moreover, she was a truly religious girl—patient and gentle and self-

denying—and she could not let Owen set forth upon his journey without expressing all her concern for his welfare—all her desire to see him a prosperous man and a good Christian. She preached to him without Owen divining it was a sermon—for she was a fair preacher, and earnest in her work. He was touched more at her interest in him than at her exhortation—for he thought she had long since forgotten him and their old friendly relations together.

“If anything will make me a better man, Ruth, it is your words to-day. Your wishes shall be my incentive to exertion when my life has begun across the seas.”

She told him how no exertions would profit him without faith in the Giver of all blessings, and beseeched him, in that new life, to be less stern and have more childlike confidence in God. He listened till his chest heaved and his eyes swam—he felt that she was right and he was wrong—and he promised to do his best, and ever seek to

remember her words. He told the whole story of his mother then—of his intentions regarding her—and had scarcely concluded when Mr. Dell advanced towards them and broke the charm which had enwrapped Owen, and made him forget time and place, and the last duties before him.

“Two hours are nearly up, Owen,” said he; “I don’t wish to hurry you, but if you have to see Mary to-night and catch the last train there’s no time to lose.”

“Well, I must begone then,” said Owen with a half sigh.

“You have been here a trifle too long already,” whispered Dell.

“Why?”

“Because you are a dolt and a dreamer, and don’t know what is best for you.”

“It is for the last time in all my life, Dell,” murmured Owen, “and she has been speaking of my welfare—earthly and spiritual. I feel a better man now—stronger in the purpose lying before me.”

"Well, well, she's a good girl, and you are to be trusted with her; but Mr. Glindon's not of my opinion."

"Does he say so?" cried Owen, losing all his pleasurable sensations on the instant.

"He don't say much, but he looks a deal more," observed Dell.

"Let him."

"And *I* don't say he hasn't a right to look so," added Dell, "not knowing too much of you, and perhaps not judging Ruth as I might. If I were a young man, I should like to knock your head off."

Owen laughed, as Dell seemed to expect some such return for his facetiæ, but it was a poor effort, and the parting was so near! Owen did not think or care for Glindon much then; he was anxious to abridge a time of trial and pain to him, and the smiles or frowns of the man were equally unimportant.

And yet when he was face-to-face with him—when, as it seemed expected by all of



them, he had shaken hands with him, he could not help saying:—

“You are left the best of girls in the world, sir—may you make her a happy wife.”

“I shall know my duty, sir,” coldly responded Glindon.

Owen did not answer. It was on his lips to say, “If you swerve from it, I am her brother and will come back to take her part;” but he adopted the wiser course of remaining silent, and turned to Ruth and her father, whose hands he could shake more heartily. His parting with John Dell was reserved for the morrow on shipboard.

“A fair journey and a fair future to you, Owen Owen,” said 92; “and an old man’s blessing on you, if it’s worth anything.”

When he had both Ruth’s hands in his, 92 said again:—

“You’ve been brought up together in John Dell’s house—son and daughter to

him—kiss her, Owen, as you've a right to."

And Owen, needing no second bidding, kissed her cheek, and Glindon stamped his foot on the garden path as heartily as though our hero were beneath it. He had had enough of this Owen; he was heartily tired of hearing his name,—the Lord be thanked that he was going on a long journey!

It seemed the beginning of that journey to Owen when he went away that day.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SECOND.

SURELY the most bitter parting was over—nothing worse could follow this. He had taken his leave of her for whom he had borne a dreamy, wild passion, and the rest that lay before him would be easy work. There was but a child to console with that night, and an old friend to bid good-bye on the morrow, and then the world before him!—the new life he had planned for himself, and the new heart he had almost promised Ruth Dell. Yes, the worst was over now, thought this sanguine man, as he set forth on that four miles walk to Mrs. Cutchfield's cottage.

As if man in his blindness and moral perversity knows what is best or worst at the time he asserts it.

Owen plodded on thoughtfully, revolving in his mind the best method of breaking the news to Mary Chickney. He was a practical man, who had set aside, for the nonce, all the troublous thoughts engendered by the parting with his first love. There would be time enough to think of *that* in the future. There was his ward to consider now, and how to reason and comfort her. He had put off the evil day of his sad communications until the very last. She was a child who would give way and weep, and whom it would be difficult to console; and he desired that she should remain happy as long as it was possible under the circumstances.

It was twilight when he neared the cottage. He could see a light behind the latticed casement, where Mrs. Cutchfield's plants were ranged. He almost hoped that

Mary had gone to bed, and only Mrs. Cutchfield remained to hear the news. It would be better after all if Mrs. Cutchfield were the recipient of the tidings, and he could take his farewell of Mary in her sleep. With this thought he walked the rest of the way to the cottage at a slower pace, and gently tapped at the door, for fear of arousing the peaceful slumbers of the child.

Some one within had been reading aloud, for the voice stopped at the summons, and Owen could hear Mrs. Cutchfield and Mary whispering together.

"I—I really think it's Owen, mammy Cutchfield!"

"Nonsense, child. Don't he always write first?"

"Not when he wants to surprise us, you know. Oh! please," and some impetuous stamping of small feet rang on the tiled floor, "*do* open the door."

"My dear, there's bad characters about —people off to the hop-picking, and so on.

There's no knowing anybody at this time of night. Who's there?"

"Owen," responded our hero.

"I said so! I said so! I said so!" cried Mary, and the feet pattered more than ever on the floor, and there was a great deal of excited scuffling inside, ending in the withdrawal of one rickety bolt, and a rush into the night air of something or some one, that tilted Mrs. Cutchfield's candlestick into the first flower-bed, and left all in total darkness.

"You dreadful child! What a mussy it had been if I had put you to bed half-an-hour ago."

"Oh, gardy dear, I'm so glad you've come to see me!" cried Mary, whose arms were round Owen's neck, and whose feet were off the ground by this time. "I was only talking of you just now, and wondering about you. Wasn't I, Mrs. Cutchfield?"

"Oh! you're always up to something," was the short answer of the old lady, who

was groping in the flower-bed to the left of the porch; "I wonder wherever you've knocked that candle to! Here's the candlestick, but wherever the—oh! here it is, and a nice mess you've made of it! A new one set up to-night, Mr. Owen, and now all over grit and muck. And I hope you're well, sir."

"Thank you—quite well, Mrs. Cutchfield."

"I was afraid something might have happened, sir."

"Oh, no," replied Owen, huskily.

"I'll get a light in a minute, when I can find the tinder-box," said the old lady, returning to the house. "Step inside, sir, and mind the chairs—Mary flopped one of 'em over running to the door. I daresay she's bruk it. Mary, don't hang round Mr. Owen's neck like that, you'll choke him!"

"I am so glad to be surprised," said Mary, obeying Mrs. Cutchfield's orders, and dropping to the ground, "it is so kind of

you to come, Owen, and surprises are so nice—arn't they?"

"Sometimes," was the hard response of our hero.

"I think I should always like them," ran on Mary, little thinking of the second surprise that awaited her, "it's better than waiting for any one, and getting cross and fidgety. Oh, it's so nice, gardy, to think of going up to bed in a minute or two, and then to have you come suddenly in—like a blessing."

Owen laughed, as his little ward, holding his hand between her own, danced at his side. His presence like a blessing to this child, whom he was going to leave—whose greatest pleasure he was about to take away! It was a laughable subject, he thought bitterly. He made no attempt to enter the house, but stood thoughtfully under the porch, with the child at his side. He was endeavouring to think of the best method of breaking the news to Mary, and



the effort puzzled and pained him. He had hoped to find her in bed, and to have been spared this parting, and even in this his plans were frustrated. Unless—ah! unless he still waited till Mary had gone to her room.

The last thought made his heart more light. He was no coward, but he feared to face the child with the shock of his revelation—surely there would be sorrow enough for her in the future without his striking at her that night! Better to let the days roll on for weeks and months until she wondered at his absence, and then—some friend to break the truth to her, and tell her that he had gone away for years. There was some advice he should have liked to give her—but no matter—he left her in good hands!

He did not know he was even then suggesting doubts by standing there so quietly in the shadow of the vine leaves that ran over the porch, with the grey landscape

and the stars, a background to his figure.

"Gardy," whispered the child, "there's nothing the matter—is there?"

"To be sure not," said Owen lightly.

"Because you've never come of a dark night before, and you're very quiet now you have come—and—and you've been holding my hands so tight!"

"I'm only waiting here for Mrs. Cutchfield's light," said Owen, "we'll talk enough presently. What a child you are!"

The click-click of the flint and steel had gone on all this time by way of an accompaniment, and Mrs. Cutchfield had knocked her tinder-box, and blew at its contents, and worried it with a damp match, and rattled away with her steel several times before a result was obtained.

"It's always the way when you've company," she said, in half soliloquy, as the brimstone end of the match ignited at last, "everything going wrong, as a matter of course. I do believe I must take to those

new-fangled bits of fireworks after all—and I can't abide 'em, for fear of being burnt in my bed."

Lucifer matches had been in fashion some twenty years then, but they were still "new-fashioned things" to this primitive dame.

"Come in now, sir," said Mrs. Cutchfield, "and excuse the candle—that's Mary's fault."

Mrs. Cutchfield was picking off the knobs of mould with which it was decorated with the point of her snuffers as Owen entered, and Mary, after a vain attempt to smother her laugh at the picture, broke forth.

"You'd better a been sorry, I think," said Mrs. Cutchfield, grimly regarding her; "there's nothing much to laugh at—is there, sir?"

"Well, not a great deal; but let her laugh—she's young."

"Ah! but old enough to know better,

sir. She must be growing steady soon, and not flying away helter-skelter out of her skin because there's a knock at the door."

"But you *will* forget that I didn't expect gardy," cried Mary, who was already on Owen's knees; "how could I be quiet after that, do you think? Oh dear, dear," with a little comical sigh, as she leaned her head back on Owen's chest, "how very happy I am now!"

"We wont spoil your happiness by scolding you then, Mary," said Owen; "yours is a sensation that is speedily rid of—eh, Mrs. Cutchfield?"

"Ay, it's a flash-like. And, God bless her, she hasn't been quite well the last two days."

"How's that?" cried Owen quickly.

"I've been trying to learn a little too hard—that's all, gardy," said she, turning round and looking into his face; "because you told me it was so nice to be clever and know everything, and I—I was going a

little back in my schooling; and when I grow big enough to take care of you and your house, gardy, and live with you always, I want to be as clever as you, for company's sake."

"Ah! I see."

"And—oh! Owen dear, there *is* something the matter!"

The great black eyes of Mary Chickney had been looking full into the face of her guardian, and a child is quick at observation. The face was changed since she had seen it last—it was a pale, stern face, and lacked its usual expression—there was something in it new and strange, and the child's heart sank.

"Mrs. Cutchfield,—oh! don't you think something has happened?" appealed Mary to the old lady, before Owen had time to assure her that it was all fancy.

"I don't know, my dear—I hope not," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "there's no bad news, sir, anywhere, surely?"

“Of course not.”

Owen answered in too easy and off-hand a manner, and Mary Chickney was not to be baffled. Besides, he was troubled, and was naturally a bad actor. The thoughts in his heart leaped very readily to the surface, and they were sad thoughts, and betrayed him. He was touched by the child's earnestness and affection—and pleasant as it was to think how he was loved and revered, bitter was the thought that he ended it all that night; and in his return—should he ever return—she would have outlived her best thoughts of him. It was life, and the way of the world—his fate was to be friendless and *alone*! And then to add to his dark thoughts was ever the suggestion—bearing on him in that hour with a tenfold pressure—whether he had acted rightly, after all? He had been anxious to leave England, to make his better name and higher fortunes in Australia—a land where names are soon known, and

fortunes more quickly made than in England, he had heard—but was he acting well by Mary? Had he considered her sufficiently? Was he keeping his promise to her who had died early—his second and best mother? What would *she* have thought of his step?—and what would Tarby think when the letter he had written reached his hands? He had meant all for the best throughout, and Mary would be taken every care of, and he should hear from her and of her very often. In danger he would forfeit all chances, and come back, true to his promise—but in the years of her childhood he would not be much further removed than at present. When she was older, and felt friendless in the world, he would be at her side again, with God's help.

Such thoughts, added to many others, crowded on him that night, and he could not shake them off, or disguise them. Tomorrow he would be on ship-board, and it was the last time he might ever hold that

dark-haired child to his breast—and she was his little sister, whom he had not believed he had loved so dearly until then.

“Dear gardy, you will tell me everything—your own little Mary,” she pleaded, clasping him round the neck; “I would rather hear everything from you than from Mrs. Cutchfield afterwards. If it’s anything sorrowful—such as your going away,” she added, with a readiness that made Owen start, “I could bear it so much better if you told me, and be comforted by you—only by you—so much more!”

“Mary, I’ll tell you, if you promise me not—not to fret about it and make yourself ill.”

Mary in her eagerness would have promised anything just then.

“It is best—and everything happens for the best, Mary.”

“Oh! I don’t believe it,” said Mary, impetuously; “but please tell me the worst now, and get it over.”



Mary lay back in his arms, and his arms pressed her closer to him. They were both white faces—guardian and ward's—then. Mrs. Cutchfield nervous respecting the coming revelation, snuffed the candle with a shaking hand, and then leaned across the table, full of interest. Was something going to happen to her dear child?—was anyone coming to take her away now, she who was nearest her heart?

“I’m going a journey, Máry,” said he, trying to render his voice less broken and harsh. Surely this parting was worse than with Ruth Dell—for here was some one who would grieve for him, and require consolation!

“A long journey?” asked Mary.

“Only six years, dear,” said Owen, tenderly; “a time that will pass by very quickly, and bring us together again.”

“Six years—oh! Owen, darling, it’s a lifetime!”

She had promised to be calm, but she

was but a child, whose estimation of her own powers was faulty ; she was of an excitable nature also, and a breath disturbed her. She was turning round with the intention of burying her face in his chest, and giving way to a passionate outburst of tears, when he held her at arm's length and said,

“You must keep your word, Mary, for my sake and your own. If you cry, I shall not tell you any more.”

Mary looked at him through her tears, and fought hard to be calm.

“I—I'll try to be quiet now,” she said, and leaned her head back in its old resting-place.

“I'm going abroad, Mary, to work for you and me—here in England it's hard to live as I wish. I have calculated on six years being enough to make a stand in the world ; if I should be wrong, still at the end of six years I shall come back to protect you till you have a home of your own.”

“Won't my home be yours ?”

"Till you are married to some one who is worthy of you."

"I won't have any home but yours—I'll build on that for six years, if you like, and count the days till you come back—Owen, I'll marry you!"

"Thank you," said Owen, smiling through his trouble at the child's ingenuousness; "six years hence you will be of a different opinion."

"Not in sixty, gardy—or in six hundred. I suppose little girls do marry their gardys sometimes—there's nothing against it, in the prayer-book, or catechism, is there?"

"Nothing."

"Lord, bless the child, how it's carrying on, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Cutchfield. "Mary, dear, you don't know what you're talking about. Mr. Owen may bring a wife back with him from forrin parts."

"No, no!" cried Mary; "that's not true, is it?"

"No," said Owen, "I think not; but leave to the future the things that will happen in it, and let us talk a little while of what is about to befall us."

"I want to forget that, gardy—oh! do let me forget that," and the tear-filled eyes and the white face returned.

"I am going to Australia, whence I shall write to you every mail, Mary, and expect by every mail that leaves England a letter from you. You must tell me all your little joys and sorrows, and keep nothing back—let me in the stranger's land follow your life step by step. You will keep your whole heart open to me for a little while longer. When I see it closing against me," he added, "I shall be less happy."

"You will never be less happy, then," said Mary.

"You have seen Mr. Dell once or twice, dear," Owen said; "he will come here more often when I am away, and see you and

Mrs. Cutchfield in my place. Trust in him, Mary, as you would in me. In any sudden trouble—which I pray may never occur to you—go to him and ask his help. You will see his daughter often, I think—learn to love her, Mary, and to confide in her also. You see, I leave a host of friends behind me.”

“Ah, but not one like you!”

“All better, and more able to guide you,” answered Owen; “and so trust in them, I say again—even for my sake.”

“Very well,” said Mary, “I will try hard to love them and make them love me. And in six years I shall see you again—and you don’t think six years such a very long time to be away?”

“It is a time that will soon pass,” said Owen. “Be patient and strong. It is a hard parting now, dear, but every week will wear off the impression. In six years you will have made new friends, mixed in new scenes, and I do not expect

ever to come back and resume the old post I abandon. Still you must keep a corner in your heart open for me, Mary, and not let silly dreams trouble you."

He was afraid of Mary dwelling on one dream too long—the child had evinced such anxiety to share his home on his return. She was but a child, it is true, but a child that thought much and saw little change—and he had not expected even in her so much evidence of her love for him, and so much pain at losing him.

He did not relate the story of his mother to her—it was a long story, and beyond her comprehension, and that mother was waiting for him at home, and alone. The hour was growing late, he was some distance from London, and there were a few instructions for Mrs. Cutchfield before he departed.

He expressed as much to Mary, who, with a sigh, unclasped her arms from his neck, and slid from his knees.

"I am going to my room now," she said;  
"I—I shall see you again?"

"Yes."

"You will not leave me without saying good-bye, gardy?" she said; "I'm not such a little child as to be run away from, for fear I should cry too much! I have promised not to cry!" she said proudly, and it was the secret of her strange composure.

"I shall see you again," answered Owen.

"I'm going to find you something for a keepsake," she said—"that will hinder you forgetting your little ward."

She went upstairs to her room, and Owen drew his chair nearer the table, and talked to Mrs. Cutchfield of future necessities; to whom she was to look for her expenses, and how she was to train Mary, and keep her heart young. Mrs. Cutchfield listened, and nodded her head, and thought within herself she did not require one quarter of his instructions, and that she was the best judge—a pardonable idea considering her

years. It did not suggest itself to her—and only to Owen when he had been four weeks at sea—that she was a very old woman, and that six years to her might stretch across the boundary separating life from death. They spoke of the interim with confidence—they were both dreamers, recking not of the chances and changes incidental to all years—and they planned little Mary's life out, as if there were no greater planners than themselves.

“That girl's a long time upstairs,” remarked Mrs. Cutchfield, “and very quiet for her. I've allus fancied she was in mischief when so uncommonly still until now. And now it's only in trouble—her greatest!”

“Shall we go upstairs to her?—it's very late.”

And Owen looked at his watch.

“I think we will. Tread lightly,” said Mrs. Cutchfield; “if she's gone to sleep over it all, it'll do her good, and I wouldn't wake her.”



"No—better not."

Owen went up first with the light, and pushed the door of Mary's room gently open.

Mary was kneeling by the bedside, and looked round as he entered. She was very pale, but on her face was calmness, and something more than calmness—something holy and full of faith. Her old protector had reared her well, and taught her in whom to trust, and in her trouble she had sought Him in that darkened room.

"I am praying that we may both be spared to see each other again, Owen," said she, innocently — "praying that you may never forget me—oh, my gardy!"

"God for ever desert me when I do," he cried, catching her up in his arms, and kissing her; "now good-bye, dear, and don't fret at my going away—it's a promise—and God bless you and watch over you. I think *He* will?" turning with an anxious face to the old woman, as if she understood

God's ways better than himself, which perhaps she did.

"He watches over little children, and loves them," murmured the old woman.

"He will watch over her," said Owen, confidently, as he let her cling round him still. "Well, where's my keepsake, Mary?"

"I couldn't find anything that would pack nicely," she returned, "or that would keep you thinking of me, except—one of my ringlets. One or two of them."

"Law's a mussy on us, look at the left side of her head!" gasped Mrs. Cutchfield. And sure enough the left side of her head was worth looking at for its novelty—three ringlets having been shorn therefrom, without any regard to future appearances.

"If you had only taken 'em proportionably, child," said Mrs. Cutchfield, whose pride had been in that glossy black hair, "but not have chopped 'em off anyhow, and lopsided your head, like. God bless you, what a naughty girl you are!"

"Here's a parcel of it, Owen," said Mary, tendering a neatly folded packet; "I hope it's—it's not too much."

"No, no. And here's the grim photograph of your gardy," said he, putting in her hand a small gold locket; "it was taken yesterday, my dear. For I am jealous, too, of being forgotten."

"You!" cried the child—"as if it were likely!"

"Well, I hope not," said Owen; "and now good-bye again."

A shower of kisses between this strange guardian and ward, a shower—heavy and thick—of tears from Mary, and a struggle with Owen to present some degree of firmness, and then he was hurrying down-stairs, and making for the garden and the country lane lying beyond.

He would not trust himself to look back until he was on the hill-top where we have before observed him gazing across the dip of land at the cottage wherein Mary had

her dwelling-place. In the old spot he paused, and looked across the dark landscape towards the house. The light was in the upstairs window still, the trees were rustling faintly in the night breeze, the peaceful stars were glittering down upon him and his ward.

“Do we know how much we are loved, or how deeply we love ourselves, till tested by such a parting as this?” muttered Owen.

A fair night on which to leave her—calm, and still, and star-lit—God’s blessing, as it were, on Mary, whispered by those rustling trees. He could echo it from the heart, and feel confident in her future, and more strong within himself to work for her and that other one whose life was taking a turn, as he thought, for the better.

The soft autumn air brought to his feet some early dead leaves, but he read no moral from them—hopes die every day and fresh blossoms come upon the tree, and life’s a mystery!

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE LAST CHANCE.

It was nearly midnight when Owen was in London. A change had come over the night since he had left his ward at Eltingham; the stars had gone in, some grey clouds had begun to sweep across the sky, and a drizzling rain to welcome him as he stepped from the bustling station into the silent, echoing streets. Had he been a man to believe in auguries, he might have thought a change awaiting him.

But his thoughts were still of the past; the present did not warn him, and the future he thought was marked out, vain

dreamer!—all had been planned and prepared in it, and it was the past alone that kept his thoughts pre-occupied as he hurried along towards home. It had been a busy, painful day, and he was glad it was over—that the partings were ended between Ruth and him, between his ward and himself. Much that had been said that day was ringing in his ears still—would vibrate therein for years to come. Words had been spoken that had gone far to change his heart and soften him; he was less confident in his own strength and knowledge, and more inclined to trust in a higher power than his own. Give him but his mother, now, to bring back to a something more pure than her steps had followed hitherto, and might he not become what John Dell and his niece wished to see him—what his childlike ward, in the simplicity of her heart, believed him? Was it so bad a world after all?—and had the shadows fallen on him more darkly than the rest of men?

He had only been a sceptic, and less inclined to meet the ills that fall naturally to all men's share.

Full of such thoughts, he had reached his home in the street leading out of the Kennington Road before he was aware of it. Apartments strangely out of order now, with boxes in the passage, significant of the great change coming with the morrow. And yet hardly significant of all, even at that hour, with a change so near at hand.

As his mother had promised to sit up for him, Owen was a little surprised to find no light burning in the room—more surprised to find, when he had struck a light and turned on the little gas-burner, that his mother had not gone to bed as he had supposed, but was sitting on the sofa fronting him, with her hands on her knees and a peculiar unfathomable look in her eyes.

“What's the matter? Why are you sitting in the dark?”

"I have been out shopping, and just come back," was the answer.

Owen looked more intently at her. It was a short answer, unlike her new manner of replying to him—a dogged answer, that reminded him of old times.

It struck him that her face was different, also—less resignation and more defiance thereon—but perhaps he was nervous.

"A late hour for shopping," he added quietly, as he took a seat near the empty fire-grate, exactly facing his mother. The position seemed to displease her, his searching looks towards her to worry and excite her.

"I wonder what you are looking like that for?" she muttered. "Do you think I am under a microscope, or can bear it? Isn't it hard enough as it is?"

"What is?"

"Oh! I don't know."

"Do you mean this present life?" demanded Owen, sternly.



"Perhaps I do," was the reply; "and hard it is, Owen. Day after day hard work, and no thanks—and your face over it all, as cold as a statty's."

"What do you expect?"

"Nothing."

"Do you think I have been unkind to you?"

"N—no," she replied; "I don't say you have—I don't say anything, mind you. I'm not grumbling."

It was something very like it, and Owen, who had expected a different welcome back, in that last hour of his stay in England, felt annoyed. More than that, he felt disheartened. His mother had been gradually becoming more dull and thoughtful; to-night had rendered her morose—brought back much of her past discontented ways.

"Have you been so good a mother to me in my life, that you should expect much evidence of my affection?" said he. "Cannot you be content with my efforts to

render you a better woman, until the time comes when you can prove your amendment?"

"Well, perhaps I can," she said. "I know you mean well, and that your heart's set on making a good woman of me. P'raps it's all right enough—but what's it to end in? Say I am a good woman some day, I shall be only slaving my life out somewhere—I who always hated work!—as a reward for choosing the narrow path, as the parson says!"

Owen frowned, and his foot beat impatiently on the carpet.

"There you go again!" cried the mother, "with your savage looks, that make one's soul sink. You're a blessed sight more like a magistrate than a son—you always will be! And I know I deserve it," she cried, suddenly taking a turn in a new direction—"that I'm a wicked, ungrateful woman, tempted by the devil to the streets again—the black devil, Owen, that hangs

to my skirts, and keeps me down. There's no hope for me—there's no chance!”

The woman burst into a passionate fit of weeping, and began rocking herself in her chair, after the old manner. Owen sat unmoved. There was no genuine emotion in her grief—it was an impulse, born of the gin that she had drunk that night. She would be railing at him a minute hence, or sneering at all those efforts for her regeneration, which he had striven for and failed in. It was a bitter hour with him; and in the first mortification at his mother's relapse, he experienced more anger than pity. He had striven to do his best, and she had eluded his efforts. There lay before him once more all that gigantic task which he had set himself—the beginning once more of the great up-hill effort to link this woman's life with his, and make it different.

“Has any one been here?” he asked.

“John Dell called late, to know if you had come back,” said she, wiping her

eyes; "p'raps seeing him has dazed me a bit. Ah! that John Dell!—he always gives me a turn that's hard to get over—and an awful turn it has been this time!"

"You give way to trifles," said Owen, peevishly; "every little check in your way is a mountain, before which you sit and moan like a fool."

"Do you know how old I am?" she retorted—"do you think at my age I have all the strength and will that has made you so brave?—do you think that there is so much ahead of *me* that I should care for this life?"

"What life have you enjoyed better than this?" asked Owen, sharply.

"The life where I was not always being watched, and where"—with a shudder—"such awfully great things were never expected of me. Why, when I was a young woman I never ——"

"I'll have no more of this," said Owen, starting to his feet—"I will talk with you

to-morrow, when you are better able to understand me. Here in England the task to reform becomes wearisome. I will hope against hope in the new world that awaits us."

The last part of his speech was more of a soliloquy than an address to his mother—a wail, as it were, over the efforts mis-spent, and the result hitherto of his greatest experiment.

"Will you go to your room now?" he said; "we must rise early to finish our packing."

"You said about twelve in the morning would be time enough to leave here?"

"There are many things to arrange before twelve."

"So there is, Owen darling—so there is," assented his mother, with a spasmodic gasp of affection.

She rose from the sofa, and stood poising herself in an upright position, previous to a start. She might feel a trifle unsteady, and

it was necessary to make a good beginning, with those "cat's eyes" of her son upon her. What the devil had she done, that she should be watched like this!

She set off at last, and came to a full stop by the centre table, on which she leaned her hand for a moment, preparative to starting afresh.

Owen touched her arm at this moment.

"Mother, you have been drinking."

"No."

"And you are lying—don't deceive me."

"Oh, dear, what a fellow you are!" sighed the woman; "there's no pleasing you—I give it up—I'll go and drown myself!"

"You have been drinking," repeated Owen.

"Only two glasses of gin at the 'Ship,'" she said, apologetically. "Not both at once—for I was a long while making up my mind to have the second—came quite home first!"

She confessed to the struggle between good and evil within her, and there had been no good once to contend with. But Owen only saw the evil that night, and his heart was closed. He was angry, too, at so poor an end to his efforts.

“You are going back—the struggle has been too much for you, and this is the reaction,” said he, his hand tightening on her arm. “Take care, mother. It depends upon yourself what son I am to be—uncharitable or loving, it is in your own hands—don’t blame me. This is a time of trial for you, and your last chance—throw it away and betray me, and I cast you back to the streets!”

The mother turned of an ashen whiteness beneath his look and words—she shrank from him, and made one feeble attempt to cover her face with her hands, but he held them down with his arm, and went on—

“I will not have your life mixed with mine, if it is to be a disgrace to us both. I

will raise you with me, or you shall sink alone. Live honestly and soberly, and I will be a faithful son; but more of this awful weakness, and I will have no mercy on you. I will raise no hand in your defence again; I will let you go your own accursed way!"

The woman shrieked, and sank on the floor, as Owen relinquished his grasp and went towards the door. Oh, what a son he was!—cruel and unmerciful; where was to be the happiness with him? Better the streets he talked of casting her back to,—better the streets, in whose welcome darkness she could enshroud herself!

Owen felt that he had been too harsh, that he had adopted the wrong method, when he stood at the door looking back on her. It might be necessary to be stern, but she had been in no mood to be talked to then, and he had chosen the wrong time, and only affrighted her. He had spoken of himself and his own anger, and the light



he had attempted to show by contrast was dim and murky; he had spoken of his own mercy, if she repented—never a word, even then, of his God's.

Owen was sorry for his harshness, and went back to her, and tried to raise her from the ground; but she tore herself from his grasp, and only begged to be left there. She would be better in the morning—she would go to her room in a minute or two, if he would only leave her—if he stayed there by her side, she would scream the house down in a minute more—would he leave her or not?

“Yes, I will leave you, if you wish it,” said her son; “if you promise me you will go to your room at once.”

“Yes—yes—at once.”

Owen left her seated on the floor, and went up-stairs to his own room, at the door of which he stood, a stern, watchful sentry, listening for a movement. Presently he heard the rustling of her dress, and the shambling

of her feet across the narrow landing-place, towards the back room on the same floor. Then the door closed, and all was still.

He was content, then, with the result; his words had pierced through the gin fumes that had besotted her—they would abide with her when she awoke in the morning, and teach her penitence and humility. He could but treat her yet as some wild beast he hoped to tame—presently he might show her he was less cold and cruel than she had fancied him. He entered his room, and sat down to think of the morrow and his best course therein—as if he were the ruler over that mysterious to-morrow which wiseacres tell us never comes. And the morrow as we dreamed it, wherein we wished to live, and make fame and fortune—the morrow we planned and strove for and prayed—does it ever come to us pilgrims so happily, that we sit down by the wayside content?

She was thinking of the morrow, too, in that darkened room. She had not thought

of a light until she had somewhat noisily closed the door behind her, and lumped herself on the floor, in a position similar to that which she had adopted in the drawing-room, after the last reproaches of her son. He would be quiet now, and not come down to worry her till the morning—*till the morning!* She shuddered as she thought of it; it was an awful prospect that morning, when he would enter with his death's face, and those dark eyes which would go clean through her, and make her feel ready to sink through the floor. He would talk of her moral weakness, and the last chance, and she would be sober then, and every word would stab like a dagger—and yet he would go on stabbing unmercifully. And after all, for what?—to make her live better, show a clean dress and face to the society she hated—render her a servant and a slave—take her to foreign parts, which she did not believe for a moment would agree with her. What *did*

it all amount to?—misery! She was to be sober, and think eternally of those many sins which had multiplied upon her since her first step from right—and thinking of them was horror! She had been all her life trying to forget them in drink, and now he took the drink away, because it was more respectable. She didn't care to live respectable—just to please him who, now he was a fine gentleman, wanted a decent mother. He was only thinking of himself—he didn't care *much* about that past life he was so anxious she should escape from! And it wasn't such a miserable life, come to think of it. There was no one but herself to please, and it *was* hard to please two, she had found that out soon enough. She couldn't please two all her life, and the time would come when he would throw her off in her weakness, and then she should be in a foreign place, where there were no old pals to look up—no old haunts to seek refuge in. No, it hadn't been so miserable

a life—lots of fun and gin! A rare exciting life, with little to do but hang about “the publics,” and spend the money one had begged, borrowed, or stolen. *He* talk of casting her back to the streets—why, the streets were her natural element, and she could exist there! She was a woman of the streets, and their darkness was congenial. She knew every turn of them, half the faces in them, and to think of it all made her yearn as for home. What if she were more dirty, more an object of suspicion to the law, and a mark of pity for people in white chokers, who were bold enough to venture her way, she was her own mistress, and it was comfortable. She had tried a change, and it had not agreed with her—let her be off. When the worst came to the worst—somehow that unfriendly meeting *did* occur with most of her pals at the last—she could drown herself. There might be a year, two, a dozen between this time and that, and between-whiles she

should be having her own way. Let her be off then, silently and cunningly, with her boots in her hand, lest the stairs should creak in her descent, and her breath bated for fear the quick ears of that proud young upstart should hear her—he was awfully sharp, like his mother!

She had unlaced her boots as thought suggested her plan of action; she had risen with them in her hands. An awful figure looming amidst the darkness—the angels who had had hope of her might have wept to see her! The old look, the old evil thoughts—the old figure borne back by the strange, irresistible attraction which sweeps back to the sea so many like unto her. For the one who clings to the rock and holds fast in the storm, how many go down? Can it be a world full of penitents, amidst a crowd of unbelievers, and erring men and women, and good men mistaken in the right way, and blundering vainly at reform—have we a right to suppose it?

What would Owen think of her? That he was well rid of his burden, or that he had been too hard upon her—she didn't know—she tried to believe she did not care. Perhaps he would fancy that she had left him because she had no confidence in her own efforts, and that it would be better to leave him to go on alone—ever better without her. If he would only think that now; very likely he would, and she would think so herself—it made going much more easy and excusable.

The door creaked as she opened it, and she cursed it for being noisy and unmanageable; the stairs were not silent beneath her weight, but cracked at inopportune moments, and scared her. She was not quite steady in her gait yet, and it was the gin's turn to be cursed, for a hot, vitriolic mixture, with no real spirit in it. She could remember the time when half a dozen glasses of gin—a dozen—only rendered her a trifle more loquacious, but kept her head

as steady as fate's. She was getting out of practice! On the hall mat in the passage, where to her surprise a small candle-lamp was burning—a beacon for an absent lodger who kept late hours. If he should turn the key now, and she should frighten him to death, or make him scream by her appearance there. If Owen, alarmed by any outcry, were to emerge from his room and come down in pursuit of her. Let her hasten away before the thought unnerved her. With Owen was captivity, and in the streets freedom and life.

She stepped into the streets, and left the door ajar behind her. It was raining heavily then, and she huddled her shawl round her and pulled the bonnet over her eyes, and in an instant it was the same world-worn, desolate figure we have seen on Markshire Downs, met in Hannah Street where Tarby's wife died.

Plodding on in the shadow of the houses went the woman to her dark estate, back of



her own free-will to the sin-haunted life from which one upward spring had been fruitlessly made. In the rain and the wind, with her head bent down, and the refractory grey hair already making its escape after the old fashion, she emerged into the Kennington Road, crossed from the "Hercules" Tavern to Oakley Street, turned down Gloucester Street, and plunged into the net-work of courts and alleys that spring thence—dens of poverty, and sin, and ignorance, and all uncleanness, which there is no sweeping away.

Had the seven evil spirits worse than the first met this woman by the way, that she should fling her arms up wildly and cry, "Home!"

## CHAPTER X.

## O U T W A R D - B O U N D.

JOHN DELL making his appearance in Owen's room at the hour of nine, A.M., was surprised to find our hero sitting thoughtfully at the table, on which were no signs of breakfast, and staring before him at the window-blinds, still left drawn down from the preceding night.

"What! Owen," he exclaimed, "is anything fresh the matter?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Your mother," after a hasty glance round the room—"she was here last night—she hasn't gone?"

"No mother of mine from this moment—I have done with her."

"Has she left you, then?"

"Ay—like a coward and a fool, who knew not what was best for her. It was her last chance, and she threw it away."

"Poor woman."

Dell took the first vacant seat by the door, and looked sorrowfully down at his feet. It was a sad termination to both their hopes concerning her.

"You seem more angry than sorry," said Dell, looking suddenly towards Owen, who had maintained the same posture, and forgotten his friend's existence.

"My patience is exhausted with this fruitless end to my labours, Dell," said Owen; "I am sick of England and all in it. It is time I was gone."

"And all in it?" echoed Dell—"thankee for nothing."

"All hopes in it—not old friends, I intended to say."

"You should say what you mean."

"Ah, that's difficult."

He was relapsing into thought, when Dell rose and shook him heartily by the shoulder.

"You want rousing, Owen. This won't do, you know."

"I know that as well as you, Mr. Dell," said Owen, gloomily—"I shan't give way—I never have despaired, and I never intend."

"What's to be done about your mother?"

"No mother of mine," repeated Owen, quickly; "that woman who stole from here in the dead of night is no thought of mine now. I have done my best with her, and failed. I warned her last night, and she mocked my warning—it is all over between us."

"How do you know you've done your best?" said Dell, shortly.

"By my conscience, which does not accuse me."

"Perhaps it may some day," was the quiet response.

"I drew the picture last night, Dell, of what she might be—what she was," continued Owen, not heeding his remark—"the son I might be to her, if she lived soberly and honest: I put her case and mine in every light, and she fled from me."

"Ay, you trusted in yourself instead of your bible, and the end is bitterness," said Dell; "you could not preach to that woman God's mercy—tell her the story of Him who died for us all."

"I was not born to be a preacher," replied Owen.

It was Dell's turn to pay no heed to a remark that might be considered personal. He was too excited and too full of his subject to stop just then, and resent it or remonstrate.

"All your talk was of the world, and she was hardened in it—there was nothing therein that could tempt her. Man, will

you never believe there is a better, higher world than this sordid one?"

"In the last I have a living to fight for," said Owen, coolly.

"Ah, you have hardened again," replied Dell—"yesterday I had hopes of you; to-day I despair. You will be ever a man to whom a trouble is an insult, not a reproof."

"All I do turns against me."

"And ever will."

"Dell, you don't want to part bad friends with me?" said Owen—"I can't think that."

"God forbid, my lad."

"Then let us drop this vexatious talk—I'm in no mood to argue—I have been deceived by an ungrateful woman, and my heart is wrung. Will you hear my plans concerning little Mary?"

"Go on."

Owen detailed them, and Dell listened. The reader is aware of them, and we avoid

vain repetitions. Suffice it to say that Dell was ready to take any trouble, any commission on himself which he thought would make Owen's mind easy whilst he was absent.

"I hope I have not detained you from business," said Owen, suddenly becoming aware that business had begun at the foundry, "time is more valuable with you than me."

"Not a bit—I'm a free man."

"I don't understand you."

"I left the service five minutes before I entered this room."

"This is sudden."

"Events happen suddenly some times—I had a reason for the step."

"May I ask it?"

"No," said Dell, with a fierceness that took Owen aback.

Owen remaining silent after so positive a denial, Dell said in his usual rapid manner,

"Cherbury was early, and I tendered

my resignation, which was accepted—what does it matter about the reason? I'm going to set up in business for myself—say that's it."

Owen looked at his watch, and Dell immediately imitated his example.

"Take one hour to reach the docks, and there's one more hour left you. Have you packed?"

"Yes."

"Is that hour a free one?"

"Almost."

"Say quite."

"It is at your service, Dell, in any shape."

"Come with me, then."

He went down-stairs, and Owen taking up his hat followed him. They closed the street door behind them and went towards the Kennington Road, emerged into that broad thoroughfare, and followed as it were the last night's track of the fallen woman. So closely yet unintentionally, that they were standing in Gloucester Street down



which she had turned only a few hours before.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Owen with a frown.

"Don't say till the hour's over that you give her up—that's not Christian-like or fair. God won't give you up so easily."

Owen felt his lip quiver, and his heart smote him. Dell, who was watching for some sign, brightened at the effect of his words, and passed his arm through his friend's.

"You have told me you were born about here; you must know her old haunts, make one turn through them with me. Call that her last chance, if you will. It's a poor effort of ours, and will probably end in nothing—still it is your duty. Will you come?"

"You have my promise—I will go anywhere with you," was the evasive answer.

Owen's stubborn spirit would not acknowledge too much—it was a chance, and he

would leave to chance his actions in that hour. Time enough to resolve if she crossed their path—for the present the stern countenance and the steeled nerves. Dell, who understood Owen better than he understood himself, led him along, and together they threaded the maze of turnings between Oakley Street and Tower Street—Westminster Road and Waterloo. It was a strange tour in that last hour of his stay; a visit that he had never bargained for, to all the foul home-spots from which he had arisen. The streets were more narrow and dark than in his youth, and in the courts and alleys down which they walked it seemed as if all honesty of purpose and all moral strength to combat the Hydra-headed Crime would ever be inevitably stifled. Men, whose faces were akin to those which had glowered at him in his boyhood, regarded Owen and Dell with evident suspicion; women like his mother watched them—screamed

and blasphemed after them—a train of dirty urchins, from four years upwards—reflex of himself in the past days—followed them till they were tired, and then flung stones at them.

“If I ever live to return a rich man,” said Owen, “I will have a refuge for the destitute near this place.”

“It needs it,” was the reply.

It was a solitary walk that Dell had taken our hero—every street had its lesson, spoke to him of the past; of his own life, which, but for one more patient than he, might have been darker than his mother’s. Had he met her in that hour he would have essayed again the task of turning her, would have taken her with him to Australia, and tried other, better methods of working her regeneration; he would have done all this, despite his assertion that it was well she had escaped them, when they were slowly, wearily making their way towards Kennington once more.

"It's a biting speech, but it's only from an unruly tongue," said Dell in answer.

"Think so, if you will."

"I wonder what sort of animal you'll turn out in six years, now?" was Dell's next remark.

"Can't you guess?"

"Ah! you're a riddle!—there's no regulating your actions by rule."

"What sort of a man does the world make of one who sets forth to encounter hardships, and fight the stout battle with no friends to back him—one who is resolved to get on, and will devote his whole soul to money-making, to the accumulation of that wealth for which the world will honour him, however vile be his antecedents? What sort of man?"

"A thundering disagreeable one," growled Dell, who hated Owen's acrid vein, and was never more out of temper than when he indulged in it.

"I shall come back a kind of young Cher-

bury—a man of the world, hard and cold, and uncharitable.”

“Cherbury’s neither one nor the other—don’t speak of him.”

“He’s no friend of mine,” said Owen, “pass him by.”

“And you aim at turning up hard and cold, and uncharitable; and talk of it as if such a character would be creditable to any man.”

“I don’t want any feelings—they’re in the way.”

“You’ll come back an ass if you don’t look out. A man who wants to be a model character always falls back into the spoony. You’re morbid, and it’s a complaint that a good sea sickness may cure. I hope you’ll be as sick as a dog! Romantic young men in your mood, would ape one of Byron’s heroes—practical men would endeavour to become a machine.”

“Do you think I shall get on?”

“Well, yes. You’re the right stuff—you’ve seen life, and can work hard. When brain work’s unprofitable you’ve two mutton fists of your own. Is this your cab?”

“I ordered it at eleven.”

“And it’s ten minutes past—come on,” said Dell. “Begin methodically, Owen. I was never ten minutes out in my life.”

Owen’s boxes were on the cab, and Owen and Dell were soon afterwards being rattled towards the Docks. Presently they were in the Docks—off which lay the outward-bound ship. A boat took them and the boxes on board, where the captain politely reminded Owen that he had given him more time than any other passenger, that the ship left at four, and no strangers that day were admitted on any account—they would be only in the way, and get hurt in the confusion natural to a ship on the eve of departure.

“Then I’ll bid you good-bye now,” said Dell, wistfully regarding him.

“ Good-bye, old friend—best of friends—true father.”

They wrung each other's hands heartily ; but it was not the iron grip of either that brought the tears to the eyes.

“ I could preach to you now, much as you hate it,” said Dell, with an unnatural hoarse laugh. “ It's a parting like this that will bring the sentiment out of a man, if he has any. But I *won't* preach !”

“ You'll give me God speed though ?”

“ Ay, and God bless you, my boy,” ejaculated Dell.

They had parted hands, and Dell, who was turning away, veered precipitately back again.

“ Yes, I *will* preach—just for a moment. And I won't take it back again, and break the promise I made my own niece. Here !”

From the depths of his breast pocket he brought forth a small gilt-edged bible, which he thrust into Owen's hands.

"It's a present from Ruth," said he; "but I don't want you—she don't—to value it for the giver's sake. Keep it—treasure it for its own. There is no truer friend, kinder adviser, better comforter, than that can be. Turn to it in your trouble, Owen, like a man and a Christian. Don't set it aside now, going the long journey on sea and by land, from the perils of which many thousands will pray for you to-morrow—none more heartily than I, lad. Do think of it a little more, and let God get the better of that proud spirit of yours. It adds to my unhappiness at parting to see it mastering you."

"You are the best of men," murmured Owen. "I shall ever be unworthy of your friendship. Remember whence I sprung."

"See what it says there about that," pointing to the bible, "it's my answer, Owen."

They were Dell's last words to him as he descended the ship's side into the boat. And



Dell's last look was wistful, urgent, and was before him all that long voyage. He felt he was close to Dell's heart, and that he really was unworthy of him—of his great affection and solicitude.

All that long voyage he thought much of him ; he kept the foreground with Mary and Ruth ; the young ward and the dreamy first love, that to a certain extent had helped to change him. In the foreground with them were his thoughts of the new life, and of the energy that was to carry him on successfully, but never the bible, John Dell's present as much as his niece's. Once or twice he had made a listless effort—for John Dell's sake, not his own—but his heart was strong and self-sufficient, and his interest soon flagged, and further and further into the background of his thoughts went the words which, with God's help, would have moulded his character anew. He had only himself to think of just then, and he did not care to pray or read bibles

on his own account. If his mother had been with him, gradually softening in character and becoming more of a true woman and mother, he might have seen God's mercy evident, and been altered thereby!

It was the silent revenge on his mother's defalcation, and he revenged it on himself! And so, with his heart a strange compound of atoms—full of life, energy, ingratitude, stubbornness, pride, and a hundred other ingredients—the waif was floated away to new lands.

END OF BOOK THE FOURTH.



## **BOOK THE FIFTH.**

**RECORDS MANY CHANGES.**



## CHAPTER I.

## ONE STEP BACKWARD.

WE have no intention of taking our readers to the Antipodes. If our hero choose to wander away to distant regions it is not our province to follow him, and it may be a matter of doubt if the reader would follow us. For our own part, speaking for the nonce as a reader of novels—whether object-novels, objectless or objectionable we are not compelled to assert—we have a rooted antipathy to travelling afar with the hero; we have our suspicions that his appearance on a foreign soil is a snare and a blind, a

check to a novelist's collapse. Once or twice we have found our suspicions misplaced; *more* than once or twice we have been unfortunate enough to see them verified. We object honestly to foreign lands in English novels—a crowd of foreign characters and incidents shot down 'in the middle of a book we just think we are getting comfortably into. Objecting to these innovations as a reader, as a writer we will be consistent, and leave Owen to his fate. We have not room for his life and adventures beyond the scene wherein this story is laid, and we shut our hearts against the ghost of a new character at this stage of our journey. Owen will be amongst us again by and bye, and business of importance with those he has left behind will occupy us till his return. His absence, after all, is somewhat convenient at this juncture; it affords us time to look a little deeper into the inner machinery regulating the life and conduct of Arthur Glindon. The absence

of one suggests a little attention to the other, perhaps a little inquiry into the nature of that opposing element between the young men, and in which both were inclined to believe.

It is as well to state here that Glindon had no better opinion of Owen than Owen had of him, and that both were far from good judges. The opposing element was a medium they saw through, and a nice distorted likeness it made of them both. The element was rivalry and jealousy ; both were clever and shrewd. young men, and both quick enough to see that they were in love with the same woman—a discovery that did not tend to induce any *entente cordiale* between them. Certainly Glindon had come out in the darkest colours, for Glindon was really less of a hero than Owen. He was a more jealous man, and had several objectionable points of character which Owen possessed not. We have already had occasion to note that he was a bad temper—let us see how



that dominant, jealous spirit behaved itself after Owen's departure.

To begin with. It was restless that night of Owen's farewells, even before Owen and Ruth had had a long conversation together in 92's garden. It had spoiled Glindon's temper, and rendered him sulky and ridiculous. The young surgeon was a man who entertained a sincere affection for Ruth, and an abhorrence of Owen, his rival—and it was not pleasant on his part to witness so great an interest in Owen's welfare evinced by Ruth Dell, notwithstanding our hero sailed for Australia the following day.

Escorting Ruth from Ansted schoolhouse that evening, the bad side of his character had showed itself too much, and startled her. He was a man who always had some difficulty in disguising his feelings, and that evening they betrayed him.

It was the first sign given of his jealous, almost distrustful, nature. There had been no

occasion for its appearance before, or Ruth might have not entertained for so long a period a belief in the thorough excellence of her lover. She had found out that he was a little hasty and irritable—never with her, but with the business of the school and the authorities thereof—but it was a surprise, even a shock, to find him quite an ordinary mortal. Glindon, up to that time, had pretty well disguised his dislike to Owen from Ruth. He had listened to her anecdotes concerning him—what a persevering, earnest young man he was, and how attached to her uncle, who in his turn looked upon him as a son; and though Ruth had detected an indifference to the subject, she had been a witness to no jealousy. She had known, too, that neither Glindon nor Owen understood each other; and the knowledge paining her, she spoke to each of the other's good attributes, in the hope of awakening an interest, and making friends of them. And she failed in her best motives, although ig-

norant how utterly, till the mask dropped suddenly from the face of her future husband, in the hour before Owen bade her farewell.

“I am going to have a long talk with Owen this evening,” she had said, as they were proceeding down the lane together—“going to try all my persuasive powers on an old friend.”

It was a very husky “indeed” that responded to this remark.

“My uncle has been for a long while disturbed about him ; he tells me,” continued Ruth, after a rapid glance at her lover’s grave countenance—“that he is anxious concerning his moral welfare. He thinks Owen is too much for the world, and in his desire to succeed therein will utterly forget greater and better things. Have you observed any change in him?”

“Oh, yes!” said Glindon—“more abrupt in his demeanour, and less wanting in com-

mon civility to me—treating me as an enemy rather than a friend.”

“Have you made any attempt to render him your friend?”

“No!—why should I? Our tastes and wishes are dissimilar—our positions in life are very different.”

“So are mine and yours,” said Ruth.

“No, they are not, Ruth,” quickly returned Glindon; “we are both servants of one institution, are we not?”

“Have we both risen from small beginnings?”

“My beginnings were small enough, at all events,” he said; “in speaking of your friend, Ruth, I did not intend to take any credit to myself for my birth or my antecedents. I contrasted our present positions—perhaps they are not so far apart as I fancied at first. Possibly he will take the lead of me—there is more energy and concentration in the man. There, is not that a fair *amende honorable*?”

"Yes," said Ruth doubtfully, for she liked not the tone of his voice—there was something strange in it.

"Then let me change the subject, Ruth. Frankly, it is a subject distasteful to me."

"But I wish to dwell upon it for a short while longer," said Ruth firmly. "Owen is a valued friend of mine—I have always looked upon him as my brother, and it is more than a little painful to know that our best friends are not appreciated."

"Does it pain you much to know, Ruth, that Mr. Owen does not appreciate me?"

"Very much," was the frank answer.

"Will it pain you more to learn that I am jealous of your interest in this young man," said Glindon hastily, and with a heightened colour; "that knowing his dislike to me, and mine to him—I disguise it not—you set him ever before me as a hero?"

"I do nothing of the kind," said Ruth, warmly; "you forget yourself, Arthur—

you are very strange and uncharitable this evening."

"I cannot see that Mr. Owen requires so much attention—he is his own master, and has a right to follow his own course. He is a man of ability and energy, I am told—I believe, or he would have never worked his way from a costermonger's barrow to a clerkship—and men of that kind will either not thank you for your interest in their future, or believe it prompted by a more tender feeling."

"Men of Owen's stamp will not think that."

"I am doubtful of the point."

"It has been my uncle's wish that I should say one or two words to Owen; and pardon me, Mr. Glindon, but I shall obey him."

"Oh! I have no intention of setting my wishes above that of your uncle's, or considering them anything but secondary to his," said Glindon, very erect with his head, and very straight in his back.

Ruth Dell's lip quivered, and her eyes swam with tears, but Glindon, looking straight a-head, did not observe the change in her. It had been a pleasant, equable courtship up to that period—perhaps a little too quiet and stately a piece of love-making, as love-making goes now-a-days—and she had been very happy, and thought Glindon so likewise. And now here was a sudden change over the brightness of the landscape, and the first cloud, no bigger than a hand, rising athwart the blue sky. She had seen a few faults in Arthur Glindon, as he perhaps had in her, but here had arisen one which might shipwreck a life's happiness. She had been to a certain extent deceived in Glindon after all—she did not know that a woman is ever deceived in the character of the man she loves, for love helps to blind and super-exalt. She only thought it was strange after so long and intimate a relation between them; but strange things *will* float to the surface to

startle one. And in life there is great diversity of character—we may tell a man at a glance; we may know one for a score of years and be deceived in him then.

Ruth and Glindon proceeded silently the rest of the way together; Ruth wished to reflect upon every word that Glindon had spoken, and that gentleman, solacing himself with the idea that he had made an impression, left it to work after its own fashion. And if Ruth were deceived in him, Arthur Glindon was still more blind to the true character of her he had been fortunate enough to win. He had ever seen her quiet, timid and gentle—a true, modest woman, that any man would be proud to possess for a wife and be sure of her value; but he was not aware of her true character, and how closely it resembled John Dell's. He had had no occasion to be a witness thereto, and had therefore very  
• greatly mistaken her. If he had been a little hard that particular evening, why it



would prove to Ruth that he had a strong will of his own, and she might as well learn to bow to it at once, and consider him the ruling agent. He had no doubt that Ruth would be almost reserved to Owen after that little expression of his opinion; and if things turned out dull that evening, still it was all for the best, and he was content.

He was not contented—on the contrary, very surprised and indignant—to see Ruth lead Owen aside, and begin that persuasive, almost energetic appeal to the better feelings of our hero, which we know almost attained its object, and which, but for an after-disappointment, that rendered him hard and uncharitable, might have effected lasting good. Glindon was mortified at the result of his lecturing—he believed that Ruth intentionally prolonged the interview to annoy him—he betrayed so much irritability under the ordeal, that John Dell read a great deal of his feelings, and closed the long conference as described in a previous

chapter. It was Ruth's defiance to the assertion of his will, and he was baffled and mad with jealousy.

And poor Ruth, whom Owen had noticed as disturbed in thought when they met, had had no intention of defying Glindon—on the contrary, had framed to herself a little scheme to bring Glindon and Owen into closer contiguity that evening; but becoming engrossed with her subject, and carried away by the hope of working a change, had grown enthusiastic and forgetful of time and place. And finally, Owen, by his last words to Glindon, had increased that gentleman's vexatious feelings; and lo! from set-fair to stormy, the hand swerved in an instant.

The storm did not break, however, till Ruth had bidden her uncle and father good night, and, escorted by Glindon, was two or three hundred yards on her way to the school-house. Then a glance at the troubled face of her lover warned her of the course of her

own love taking a turn. From that night, in that hour, suddenly a turn. From the peace and perfect faith in her future and in him, to that lower level common to us all—to the sorrows, and anxieties, and fears which love must be subject to, as well as everything else in the world.

“What is the matter?” was her first quiet and natural inquiry.

“The matter is, that I have been deceived.”

“By whom, Arthur?”

“By you.”

He was in no mood to soften his words—the curtain had dropped between him and his master-passion—and jealousy has no gentleness, justice, or fair consideration.

Ruth’s hand left his arm as though it had been stung like her heart—she accused of deceit, and by him!

“I have been deceived in my estimation of you,” he went on; “I fancied if you loved me you would have had respect for

my wishes. I believed I might rely upon you to study my feelings a little."

"In how have I offended?" asked Ruth, quietly regarding him. Her look was steady, though her heart was aching with her new surprise. He had so well disguised his passion, that the sudden change had for the moment rendered him a new being by her side—surely it was not to this man that she had pledged her faith, and evinced the wealth of her affection?

"In defying me. In holding a secret conversation for two hours or more with that young, sulky brute, in whom your *sisterly* interest is so strong."

Ruth gasped for breath at this charge. It must be all a dream, not waking life, and she would find herself in the school-house presently; at her desk, and the children's lessons heaped before her, waiting critical examination.

"I don't know whether it is worth while to explain," said Ruth, after a little struggle

with her composure; "I will give you an explanation if you wish it, sir."

"I wish it, Miss Dell."

Terrible side-thrusts these "sirs," and "misses," and "madams," after the "Arthur's," and "Ruth's," and "dears," of a few hours since;—your last little tiff with that beloved being of your choice, O reader! will give you an idea of their force and significance.

"It is a repetition, sir, and unnecessary, but heat of passion may have rendered things confused."

"I am quite calm—I was never more calm in my life, Miss Dell," and his teeth went half through his lower lip as he spoke, and the pain made him swear, *sotto voce*.

"My brother——"

"Your brother!" he interrupted, angrily.

"My friend Mr. Owen," corrected Ruth, "was in trouble. In that great trouble, when the heart is narrowed to the truths of

life, and one is growing a sceptic and a visionary. I had fancied it in my power to say the right word that might move him; my uncle thought so too, and I attempted it. I think I have succeeded, and, thinking so, I have no cause to regret the course adopted, or even the anger of Mr. Glindon."

"It was a word that took two hours to say," he muttered.

"There was much to speak of—he was going away for many years, and about to leave a little ward to the care of me and my uncle. There was a story of his own to relate, too; of his own efforts to rescue a poor suffering sinner from the darkness—such a story as might have warmed your heart, even to the man you bear so strange an antipathy to."

"It is more than an antipathy," cried Glindon; "I hate him—I should be glad to learn that the ship he sailed in had gone to the bottom! I am tired of his praises, and,

if they could be ended thus, I should not sorrow for his fate."

"Mr. Glindon, I have been deceived in you," said Ruth, and despite all her efforts there was no rendering her voice firm; "you have shown an ungenerous spirit—you have betrayed a passion hardly reconcilable with the actions of a sane man—you have wished evil to one of my best friends, and expressed a want of confidence in me—it is better that we part at once."

"Very well, madam—if an opinion cannot be calmly expressed without your taking dire offence at it, perhaps it is better," said Glindon, hurriedly. He hardly knew what he was saying—Ruth Dell had resented his words so quickly and effectually, that he had no time for consideration—perhaps it was better, as he had said. He did not know, just then; his head spun round so, and his blood was so far in advance of fever-heat.

"Better to find that we are not fit for

each other now, than at a later day," continued Ruth, "to acknowledge at this time that our engagement was a mistake and a folly."

"You are strangely anxious to be free," said Glindon; "so sudden a wish to break asunder the ties that have been formed between us suggests a suspicion—"

"I am above suspicion, sir," said Ruth, proudly.

"Your pardon—possibly I am hasty—I—I— Ruth, do I understand you," he asked, in a hoarse voice, "that you really think the better plan for both is to think no more of each other? After all this while—you think so?"

"I do."

"Good-bye, then—" and with an impetuous swirl of his heel he faced about, and went rapidly down-hill, leaving Ruth alone at the school-house gates. Could it be really the waking life, thought Ruth, when she was in her own room, pressing



her hands to her aching temples; had the one romance of her life ended, and was the old prosaic existence to come back again? Had Glindon really uttered all those cruel words, and betrayed the passion of a child, and been uncharitable, and vindictive, and wrong? What an end to all the fancy-picturing of only a few days ago, and yet how much better for her! Both had acknowledged it to be so much better; and yet how strange it was to know oneself free, and yet feel weighed down by iron chains. Was it more easy to talk of separation than realize the idea of it? She had not engaged herself hastily to Glindon, and a hasty severance from his love seemed strange and unnatural. Well, it would take time to become reconciled to the shock—but she was a strong woman, and her mind had been well regulated, and was capable of training itself to anything. After that time all would be well with her—every day would make her silent, undiscoverable

sorrow more bearable. She was sure of that.

She was right in her convictions, for her thoughts were not alone of this world; loving and doing her duty in it, still she had never swerved from those higher duties taught her years ago by her uncle, and her faith was on the rock that abideth. With Owen, a great loss, a great worldly sorrow was a blank to his life-time; he acknowledged no power beyond his own to give him ease. A wanderer on the desert strewn with his dead hopes, he passed on, famished and weary, caring not for the oasis in the waste, or the well-spring that might give him new strength. Man bereaved, seeks the world and its action—true woman, her bible and God.

## CHAPTER II.

## A YEAR'S RECORD.

ARTHUR GLINDON, after parting with Ruth, went off at a railroad pace, as excited, ungovernable, and dead to passing events as any inmate of Bethlehem hospital. The barriers that restrained his evil tempers had given way, and the flood of angry emotions swept him along unresisting. He strode on like one possessed; he cut at the heads of the nettles in the shadowy hedge-rows with his walking-cane; he stopped to stamp his foot angrily on the ground more than once, and to ejaculate a hundred anathemas on Owen, and, when tired with Owen, on himself.

He crossed a stile and made for some fields, the path through which was a near cut to Oaklands, and coming close to the house of his friends the Cherburys, he turned back again, and went along field after field once more till his feet were wet with the dew.

The church clock was striking two when he was at his apartments in Ansted town—it had taken five good hours to walk the passion out of him. “When the devil gets the mastery of me, I try to walk him down,” he had once told his friends; and whether the devil were underfoot or not, there was my gentleman, tired and exhausted, letting himself in with a latch-key when all the honest folk of Ansted were slumbering in their beds.

He did not think of his own bed that night, but lighted the candle-lamp and sat himself down on the sofa, and crossed his arms like a stage villain. He was restless, and could not sit there, however—and in a moment or two he was on his feet once more

and pacing the room, till the thought occurred to him that his landlady slept in the parlour underneath, now her house was full.

He took a chair, and, for the first time, noticed a letter that had been awaiting his return since last post; he opened it, read it, passed his hands through his hair, and stared at it again—half in surprise and half vacantly.

“At this very time,” he muttered, more than once, and then folded the letter and put it in his pocket with a fierce downward thrust, as if even his pocket had offended him. From the chair to the sofa he shifted his position once more, and before the clock had struck three he was again in the chair, with all the devil out of him at last, and something like contrition fighting its way uppermost. He had been a fool and a madman, and thrown away his best chance in life—severed himself, by his own words, from the only woman who would ever have

made him happy. Since his engagement he had been a new man, less dissatisfied with everything and everybody, and feeling more steady, and more like a rational human being. He had not been so ready to take offence, or stand upon the order of his dignity since his knowledge of Ruth—gradually, almost imperceptibly, his love for her had worked a marvellous change in his character. Her patience and gentleness had exercised its influence over him—to how great an extent he did not know till that moment, now the evil fit was burnt out, and the result of it all was staring him in the face.

It had been always so with him—it would be thus till there was an end of him now—he could see the end beyond there very plainly! In old times he had striven for honours and fame, and, gaining them, had thought them of little worth till Ruth had taught him better—it would be the same again, now he had lost the only prize he had ever cared to treasure. His passion

had mastered him, and carried him away from her—there was no sailing up the stream that had borne him so ruthlessly away. He did not know till then how much he had loved her—in the quiet days preceding the disruption he knew that he was happy. There was no consolation in the thought, now, that it was better they had parted—that from natures so utterly dissimilar must arise trouble and anxiety ; the fact that he had lost her became every instant harder to bear.

“ You were not equals,” hissed his pride ; but his pride had ever tormented, never comforted him, and he would take no consolation to himself from that source. “ She would have honoured any station,” said his common-sense ; “ She would have altered my whole life,” cried despair.

Change was the one thing absolutely necessary for him, and the letter he had received offered it. He must begone—he could not enter the school day after day,

and meet her looks, and feel he was a stranger to her—that all thought and sympathy between them were entirely cut off. He was impulsive, and the great thought now was to put some hundreds of miles between him and his old love. He would begin immediately—vanish away like a dream-figure.

Glendon opened his desk, and began at once to write his resignation as consulting-surgeon to Ansted school. The board met on the morrow, Saturday, and no time would be lost. He had received another appointment, better and more lucrative; and he trusted the committee would not offer an objection to his immediate withdrawal. He thought he would write to John Dell after he had signed and sealed his first letter, expressing his regret at the dissolution of the engagement, his love for his niece, and so forth; but he began one letter after another, and tore them in pieces after the first few lines, and scattered the fragments on the carpet. He gave up that attempt—he was



in no proper frame of mind for composition —so he tore up his final sheet of paper, and contributed his last quota to the little snow-storm which had already fallen around him.

“So we are to lose Mr. Glindon’s services, Miss Dell,” said the secretary to Ruth the following day. “He is very anxious to depart, and has already named a successor, whom he thinks will suit us. But the committee will not be treated quite so cavalierly, and he must serve another month with us, however objectionable his post may have suddenly become.”

Ruth heard all with a pale face, and a heart that was unsteady in its movements; albeit she returned a few general remarks, and went to her desk, and to the weary lessons, which she had to endure between that time and one o’clock. She had not altered her mind, like Arthur Glindon; she was still convinced how much better it was that it had all ended thus, and how un-

suitable a husband he would have been for her ; but she was troubled nevertheless. She had not given her best affections away lightly, and they were centred in him still—she was sure of it—even when the knowledge that they were irrevocably parted seemed more firmly established each day. She could wish him in her heart every happiness, and a better wife than she should have made him—she prayed for both when Glindon thought she had wholly forgotten him.

The committee of Ansted school, knowing nothing of this love affair, held firm by their bond, and kept Mr. Glindon to his month's engagement. Consulting-surgeon to an hospital in Scotland was a matter of no account to them—the Scotch patients must wait for their clever doctor, and the doctor for his more handsome salary. It was the way of an ungrateful world to forget on the instant past benefits, when something more substantial turned up in its favour.

Glindon, who had become surgeon to Ansted school solely on Ruth's account, chafed at the delay the first week; but was after that period more reconciled to his position, even sorry that the days were numbered when he should see Ruth no longer. It was a curious sensation to meet her every day, and she so cold and business-like; it aggravated him at times, and brought on his bad tempers or his morbid fits, both of which he kept to himself, like a wise man.

Ruth had apprised her father and uncle of the change, and 92 had said, "Lord bless me!" and asked no questions; whilst John Dell had reappeared at Ansted to ask a hundred. Ruth simply told him it had been a quarrel, and both had expressed a wish to separate. She begged him not to press her to relate the details of all that parting—her wound was unhealed, and she owned the subject distressed her.

Dell respected her wishes, and went back to the new business he was planning,—of

which more anon. He was sorry for Ruth, for Glindon also. He loved the one and had some respect for the other, as a clever and rising young man—it was odd that a break had occurred so soon after Owen's departure for Australia. He thought, perhaps, Owen was connected with it—that the dark looks of Glindon that night had been followed by words which the spirit of his niece was not likely to brook.

“So serve him right after all, if he doubts her,” said John Dell; “she isn't a romantic girl, and losing a surgeon fellow wont hurt her much.”

Such was Dell's opinion, and then he dismissed the subject—love affairs didn't trouble him a great deal now.

But if losing the surgeon did not hurt John Dell's niece, it made her thoughtful beyond her years, and robbed some of the light from her countenance. Her school duties became simply a wearisome round of teaching for a while, and the interest she

had taken in them all her life seemed suddenly lost. She would get over it after a while, but the shock to her confidence and love was recent yet, and she was a girl who had never learnt the art of disguise. Mrs. Cherbury, the only lady in the secret, was the first to detect a difference in Ruth, and the first lady to guess at the cause.

“My dear, you have had a lovers’ quarrel with Mr. Glindon,” said she, one afternoon, between school hours, in Ruth’s neat parlour, looking on the country road; “I’ve been sure of it the last week. Now, do own it, my dear.”

“We have expressed some little difference of opinion, and discovered that our ideas on things right and wrong are widely dissimilar—and so, like two rational beings, we have made up our minds to part.”

“Part, my dear child!” exclaimed the loquacious dame—“oh, that’s the nonsense all sweethearts talk when there’s a difference. Poor Cherbury and I made up our

minds to part half-a-dozen times before we took each other for better for worse—it's all fussy stuff, my dear."

"I am sorry you don't believe me."

"I wouldn't believe you on any account—I should be too grieved, my dear Miss Ruth, for you're just the young lady that suits me, and I want to see you comfortably settled. You were brought into the world to be comfortably settled—a handsome clever husband was the blessing intended, depend upon it."

Ruth smiled.

"I don't think it will be Mr. Glindon, then."

"But won't you tell me the story?" implored Mrs. Cherbury, passing one fat hand over the other in a fidgety manner; "I am so fond of a love-story, even when it goes all wrong—and you won't disappoint me? If you won't tell me I shall ask Mr. Glindon."

"Pray, don't do that," said the alarmed

Ruth—"he will think that I have been speaking of him — grieving, perhaps, for——"

"Pray, don't be fussy, my dear," said the old lady; "do you think I would mention you to Mr. Glindon if you did not wish it? It's not like me—I'm a woman of few words, and keep my own counsel. And, oh! I am so sorry the match has been broken off—if it be really broken, what am I to do? Isaac's left off giving dinner-parties, and talks sometimes of selling the business and going abroad—and if he take me with him, why you will never find a husband for yourself, you're such a poor quiet thing."

Ruth could not forbear a second smile, there was something so genuine in the old lady's manner, and in the midst of much useless verbiage there lurked always the feeling heart of the woman. And one woman can confess to another so much of a love-secret without descending from the

sublime to the ridiculous. Ruth did not feel half so much reluctance to conceal her story from this honest dame, as from her uncle John. A little more pressing on the part of the lady brought forth the story, to which Mrs. Cherbury listened with rapt attention, and scarcely breathed till the conclusion of the narrative. Since she was a little girl in pinafores, and compelled by her governess to sit painfully mute, she could not remember her tongue remaining so long motionless. She made up for it at the conclusion, however, and expressed her opinion on the matter at some length. Our version is an abridgement, which the indulgent reader will possibly excuse.

“Well, to think that that’s all,” with her eyes distended with astonishment, “that there’s no young woman in the case, no flirtation on anybody’s side,—only a little warm discussion, such as you and I might have had, if you were a bad temper, and couldn’t put up with my ways. Fifty



times poor Cherbury and I were jealous of this young man and that young woman, and said, oh! ever so many more cruel things, and there we were hankering after each other just the same before the end of the week. It can't be thoroughly broken off?"

"Thoroughly," repeated Ruth.

"Dear me, it's a very uncommon case, and I had no idea Mr. Glindon and you were such a fussy couple. I suppose it's the fine feelings of the two make all the difference."

Such a remark, emanating from another person, would have sounded like polite sarcasm; but there had been never a mite of acerbity in the good lady's disposition. She had risen from a low sphere—had not been very elaborately finished off by governesses and foreign masters—and had quite a respect for fine feelings if they were not allied to "fussy" ones. Moreover, she was really grieved at the separation be-

tween Glindon and Ruth. Match-making was her forte, and this was a young, good-looking couple, whose faith in each other should have lasted all their lives. If, before the gulf widened between them, she could bring them together again, what a triumph for her. She was sure Ruth was unhappy ; and Mr. Glindon, who came once to Oaklands, and whom, more than once, she met in the green lanes—purposely, perhaps, after the relation with which Ruth had favoured her—looked like the ghost of himself, looking about for its own corporeality.

“ You must come and spend a quiet evening with me—you are moping yourself,” said Mrs. Cherbury to Ruth, a few evenings before Glindon’s month expired. “ You never have a change now, and it’s so necessary, my dear.”

“ But I am very well, thank you, Mrs. Cherbury !”

“ But I know better. Haven’t you a pain

here?" and the old lady laid her hand on her capacious chest or stomach, for it was difficult to say where the one ended and the other began.

"Not any pain at all, I assure you," said Ruth, laughing.

"Doctors tell us there's nothing like change, and I hope you will come."

Ruth felt inclined to ask if any company were expected, but she had confidence in Mrs. Cherbury not exposing her to the embarrassment of a meeting with *one* mutual friend at least. It was not likely that she would so far help to pain her,—she who knew so well how everything was at an end between her and Arthur Glindon.

But we are all the victims of misplaced confidence in our turn, and Ruth, dreaming not of a snare, was betrayed into visiting Oaklands, where Mr. Glindon and Mr. Isaac Cherbury were spending the evening together, for the sake of a change also.

"Dear me, what a singular coincidence

now!" said this old hypocrite, flinging up both hands with affected consternation. "My dear Ruth, you will never believe but what I planned all this?"

And Ruth never did believe anything to the contrary. She could see at a glance that Arthur Glindon was equally as surprised as herself; that he turned white and red, and frowned at Mrs. Cherbury, as if with the hope that his glances would shrivel her to nothingness. Mrs. Cherbury had meant well; but it was a clumsy contrivance to bring the "young people" together. She thought so herself the instant Ruth had entered the drawing-room, and paused at the door, looking in with a troubled expression of countenance. She had meant well, but it was a terrible muddle—she could see that now, although a "change" had been a good excuse to lure Ruth, and Isaac's head a fair apology to bring Glindon to Oaklands.

She might have imagined that Mr. Glindon would see the delicacy of his posi-

tion, and rise immediately to take his leave in a quiet, easy, off-hand manner that was natural, and put no one out. The first shock over he was himself again, save and except a trifling attempt of his blood to rush to his head, and keep him a bright vermillion; and after a few general remarks to Ruth, such as he had bestowed on sudden meetings with her in the schoolhouse, he shook Cherbury by the hand and departed.

Ruth Dell did not remain above an hour at Oaklands; her first impulse had been to resent Mrs. Cherbury's manœuvres, for she had never felt more inclined to indulge in the haughty and indignant vein, but that well-meaning lady was so truly sorry for her own weak plans, and sat so confused and penitent for past errors, that the heart of Miss Dell was not hard enough to resent the indignity.

She was glad to be on her way back to the school-house at an early hour, however; she was poor company that night, and "the

change" had done her more harm than good. It was daylight yet when she was on her way home on foot—the offer of Mrs. Cherbury's carriage having been declined, for more reasons than one. A warm evening for an autumn month, with only a few dead leaves flickering here and there to the ground—augury of the bright days coming to an end, and the cruel winter time stealthily on its march towards her.

Turning the bend of the road before the ascent of the hill was commenced, Ruth came face to face with Mr. Glindon.

"Pardon me," he hastened to say, "I did not mean to alarm you. I have only a few words to say, Miss Dell."

"Is there necessity for any between us, Mr. Glindon?"

"I have been waiting an hour to see you," he said, speaking in an excited manner; "I have been anxious to assure you that our meeting at Oaklands this evening was entirely unpremeditated on my part—

that my last thought would have been to insult you by my presence at that house. You will believe that, Miss Dell?"

"I have not believed for an instant that you intended to meet me at Oaklands."

"If I have pained you—"

"You have not pained me, Mr. Glindon; I have no complaint to urge against you. Pray allow me to conclude this interview."

Ruth drew down her veil with a trembling hand: she had intended to be very calm and lady-like, but Glindon's excitement had unnerved her. She did not know how far he might venture on a strange topic, and she was anxious to be once more alone.

Glindon regarded her wistfully, but allowed her to pass him. Then an impulse not to be resisted—he was ever impulsive—carried him towards her again.

"Miss Dell, I am going away in three days. Before I go, will you allow me to express my regret at the angry words, the

unjust words, that severed an engagement on which I had built my hopes of happiness?"

Ruth Dell felt it was necessary to curb all emotion, to press it down by any weight, at any sacrifice just then. Women are capable of strange metamorphoses; it was the grave schoolmistress of Ansted that calmly surveyed him.

"I am obliged by your doing me justice, Mr. Glindon. I thank you."

"I am going away a miserable man; will you give me one hope to keep my path straight, my soul from collapsing?"

"You are extravagant, Mr. Glindon—more, you are unmerciful."

"Why unmerciful?"

"To revive a subject that is ended for ever, and can but give pain."

"Not ended for ever, Miss Dell," he cried impetuously; "for years if you will—but not for ever!"

"Mr. Glindon, what do you expect from



me?" said Ruth. "What am I to understand by this wild manner?"

"I am not vain enough to dream of a renewal of our engagement, Miss Dell," said he; "I have fallen in your eyes, and a few hasty words will not raise me. But will not future efforts, future deeds, lead the way to some hope?"

"I have lost all confidence," said Ruth, scarcely able to keep back a sigh.

"Then I go away an objectless man. I cast myself on the world, seeking amidst it forgetfulness or ruin, and caring not which."

"For shame, sir!—for shame!"

Ruth reproved him, but it was in a softened tone. She was a woman, not a machine, and he had been very dear to her once. More, he was a strange man, and she did not know, could not guess, if he still loved her, what the end might be of this wildness. Glindon noticed the change in her tone, and his heart leaped within him.

Here might be hope after all—he had grievously offended her, but she might forgive him in time. He became eloquent in his defence—he only begged for one hope in the future.

“Say nothing, promise me nothing, but that you will remain free for one year—I will call that a hope, and live on it.”

“I shall never be engaged again, Mr. Glindon,” said she; “the reality of life has begun with me.”

She thought so then, and Glindon took it as his answer.

“God bless you—I will live to deserve you yet,” he cried, and turned away, leaving Ruth strangely excited and perplexed.

Had she really made a promise, given him hope to win her by his better conduct in the future—what did it all mean?

The subject perplexed her long after Glindon's post in the school-house was filled by a stranger—kept her brain busy during the long winter, the following spring and

summer. She neither saw nor heard anything of Glindon during that time, but he did not die out of her thoughts—gradually the last meeting seemed to soften the recollection of their first quarrel ; and though she would confess nothing, she wondered what the end of the year would result in. Early in the autumn she read in the papers of a surprising cure effected by Mr. Glindon, of —— Hospital, Scotland—a cure by a new method, that spoke of a clever man's close application to his profession. And in the autumn time, when the past wrongs were one year old, when absence had, perhaps, made the heart grow fond—who knows?—Glindon re-appeared amidst the Surrey hills, and calmly and earnestly made the tender of his hand once more.

He had kept her memory green during one year of absence—she was still his first thought—he expressed unfeigned sorrow for the past, and, after a little struggle with her feelings, and a little more grave reflec-

tion, she re-accepted him. So they were lovers again, and another year's engagement was entered into. Ruth would not hastily risk her happiness by becoming his wife at once. Amidst all the new bright thoughts that had returned to her, there lurked still a latent fear that she had not acted for the best—for one year more he must wait for her.

Taking counsel of John Dell, he had said, abruptly,

“What do I know of your sex—what advice can I give to one who don't know her own mind?”—the harshest remark that ever escaped her uncle's lips towards her. But he was worried with his business just then—it was up-hill work; and though he flagged not in the ascent—he never flagged—still it tried his temper at times. Perhaps an old idea had come back to him since the disruption of his niece's engagement, and now it had flashed away again to the ether, and was more distant than ever.

So they were lovers again, we repeat, and Mrs. Cherbury *did* manage pretty well to bring about that relationship, judging by the result which this chapter records.

## CHAPTER III.

## MARY.

ARTHUR GLINDON went back to Scotland in a happy frame of mind ; his troubles were over, his first love had returned to him. He should never be jealous again, he thought—the prize he had so nearly lost, he would now know how to estimate at its fair value. It was not so comfortable an engagement as the first ; for they were many miles apart, and he could only contrive to see her once or twice in the three months—seldom more often. They corresponded more frequently, and bridged over space that way ; and if circumstances

ran a little adverse just then, why there was coming a time when one home would be theirs.

Glindon, in his impetuous manner, had wished to resign his new post of surgeon at the hospital. It was bringing him a fair competence—it was a settled independence, but he was away from her, and he was sure he could find something equally as good in London. He did not care for it very much—it was not exactly what he had expected—what did Ruth think of his throwing it up altogether?

Ruth expressed her thoughts on the subject very firmly. She was sorry to see the old failing, the old dissatisfaction, still a prominent feature in his character. He was energetic in striving for honours, and the honours were little esteemed when attained. It was ever the far-away prize at which he grasped, and in the present there was never content. Would it be the same some day with herself, and had the difficulty of win-

ning her only aroused his desire to conquer her resolves ?

Glindon said "no"—ten thousand times no to such a thought, and remained at the hospital, a living testimony to his own power of settling down.

Whilst the lovers wait and are patient, we can afford to look round and note the progress of other characters whose lives have been linked with our hero's. The business of the piece assures us we must not allow the reader to forget them.

John Dell was trying his fortune his own way, when the engagement was renewed. Three months after Owen's departure he had essayed the experiment when his niece considered herself once more happy the business was established, and John Dell in deep water. All the sunken rocks lying beyond the harbour of his neat little investment had been cleared by his shrewdness and foresight ; and, with health before him, there was little doubt of the success of his



venture. His old employer, Mr. Cherbury, had begun like him; hundreds had begun like him since the world began—there is no secret in money-making, if one be steady and have a fair amount of brains in his head. Only a fair amount is necessary; an undue preponderance forces a man to be ambitious of a name; sets him on out-of-the-way paths ending abruptly; deceives and misleads; makes one take credit for being a genius, and renders everything top-heavy. A genius earns the name more often than the money—the world, that will not put a penny in his pocket, will cry out what a clever fellow he is; and the clever fellow so seldom sticks honestly to work like a practical man.

John Dell saw his way, and put his shoulder to the wheel. There was nothing to distract his attention. Mankind had not flattered him. He had never been in the newspapers (he had once written a letter to the *Times* concerning his opinion on Strikes, which letter an unfeeling editor had not con-

sidered worthy of insertion) ; there were no wife and children to assert a claim on his time, attention, and money; his undivided exertions could be turned in any direction ; and even if he failed, there was no one to feel the blow save himself. Not that Dell intended failure ; on the contrary, success was the object for which he had made up his mind. But disappointment would not have broken his spirit, or altered his character one iota. Riches or poverty would make no difference in honest John Dell.

He began in a small way at the old business of engineering. He rented small premises Southwark way, and started with a few hands — volunteers from Cherbury's works, who would have gone anywhere with the old foreman, and taken no denial from him. Everybody worked with a will, and what a deal can be done in all professions when the will flags not over the first up-hill road ! The difficulties were many, but John Dell surmounted them. The premises began

to be enlarged, orders to increase, confidence in Dell's work to become established. It was not an immense firm at the end of two years—it might never be anything like that from which he had so suddenly withdrawn his services ; but it required a hundred and fifty hands constantly employed, and where the staff is large, and work well looked after, the profits flow in like a blessing on good management.

Amidst the pressure of his new employment, Dell forgot not to write regularly to Owen, and pretty regularly in return came back the letters from the wanderer. He was in Melbourne, and in business for himself, also, he said ; he had no reason to complain—he was sticking hard to his work, and saving money thereby—if he made not a fortune, he did not think he should return when the six years were up without a few hundreds in his pocket. He asked many questions concerning his ward, and was referred to Ruth for the best information.

Dell had no more neglected Mary Chickney than he had his letters to Owen ; he saw the child regularly, and settled accounts with Mrs. Cutchfield, whom he thought a trifle too garrulous concerning old Markshire times, and inquired very closely into the religious instruction that Mary was receiving. For he was an old-fashioned man the reader knows, with the good old-fashioned belief that there was nothing like the bible as the base of education ; the central and great study, the apex to all the accomplishments. Behind the times you see, reader—for those who study the bible hard now-a-days, try to pick it to pieces, in lieu of pinning their faith to it. It is an age of critics, and we “review” even Isaiah and St. John !

Dell was a man fond of children, and regretted that he could not apply himself more intently to Mary’s progress. He was interested in Mary, in her life, and youth, and generous impulses—in her grand belief

in Owen, the one object of her childhood's reverence. He entrusted her to his niece's care more especially. Ruth had more time on her hands than he, and could watch her more intently.

"Spare no expense in her education," wrote Owen; "she may have to earn her own living some day. I think I shall bring her up as a schoolmistress—an honourable and praiseworthy profession."

Ruth went to Mrs. Cutchfield's twice a week at least to make inquiries; and the old lady, who first objected to so much espionage—"as if she didn't know how to manage the blessed child, and hadn't seen to her education, and found her the best school long ago!"—took finally to Ruth Dell, who had the tact to obtain her own way in a few matters which she thought necessary, without wounding the feelings of the *gouvernante* in the effort.

"She's a good young lady, that John Dell's niece," she remarked more than once;

“but then she comes of a good stock, and that’s everything.”

Little Mary Chickney of course took readily to Ruth, wished she lived a little nearer Ansted school to be a pupil there, and could not understand why the rules of that establishment would not have admitted her if she had. And would the rules matter so much, or the people who made them be very cross, if Miss Dell were to smuggle her in over the palings? Mary Chickney loved Ruth for herself, her gentle manners, that kind, loving way which she had with children, and more especially with her; but much that tended to promote the affection was Ruth’s knowledge of Owen. Ruth knew her dear gardy, who wrote her such long, kind letters from Australia, telling her to keep good and grow up clever for his sake and her own. She had been brought up with Owen, remembered him when he was a little boy, could relate many anecdotes concerning

him. And everything and everybody was secondary to the guardian—the love that should have been lavished on a mother, father, sisters, had been concentrated in him, and nothing would ever shake the child's worship. She was never tired of talking of Owen, hearing others speak of him—it was an inexhaustible subject, on which she became ever eloquent.

“I wonder you never married him, Miss Dell,” said Mary; “I wouldn't have let him grow up without loving me, if I had been always with him, and your age.”

“But suppose I thought of marrying some one else, Mary?”

“Yes; but it's funny you should—knowing my dear Owen so well. But you've lost your chance now, and he's coming home to marry me when I'm big enough.”

“You must not tell anyone that. It sounds bold, and you are growing a big girl now.”

“I'm just thirteen, Miss Dell.”

"And thirteen is too young to get that impression on your mind, my dear. It may do you harm," added Ruth, who was a little startled at the child's persistence in the statement; "and give you false views of life. You should look on him as a brother—father—guardian. It would distress him very much to think you were growing up a young woman, with the same impression that as a child was a little jest between you."

"Don't you think he will marry me, then?"

"I cannot think it likely, my dear Mary. You will have the same idea as myself when you are two years older."

Mary looked very grave at this. She could not understand it, or why it was wrong to cherish the thought.

"Perhaps he'll bring a wife home with him, Mary."

"No, he said he would not do that," said she quickly; "he won't love any one better



than me out there, I know. And if he comes back, and I can live with him and keep his house, and see him happy, it doesn't matter whether I'm his sister, his wife, or his grandmother, does it?"

"It's a strange subject to dwell upon," answered Ruth; "let us change it. I am going to write to Owen a full account of your progress; will you add a postscript, or write a little letter that you can enclose in my own?"

"I think I should like a little letter all to myself," said Mary, after a moment's reflection; "do you think you will have room for a ringlet?"

"Well, it makes such a mess, Mary."

"A mess!" said Mary disconsolately, not seeing that the observant Ruth had detected the faintest bud of a romantic disposition, and so ruthlessly nipped at it.

"All the loose hairs straggle about so."

"Ah, so they do; and I remember Owen writing to say that he thought he had quite

enough now—he has had one with every letter, and he took some away with him in a parcel. I wonder what he's doing—whether he's thinking of me now, and fancying I shan't grow up a good girl? As if I shouldn't do that, knowing how much he wishes it.”

• Ruth wrote her letter in Mrs. Cutchfield's house on a Wednesday afternoon, and Mary sat by her side and concocted her own careful epistle, making one or two inquiries as to matters of spelling as she went on. It was good news Ruth sent to Owen, news of his ward and her moral, intellectual, and physical growth; and in due time Owen very gratefully thanked her for the missive, and sent an especial note to Mary in reply to her epistle,—a note that set Mary wild with delight because he was so well in health, and talked of only four years now instead of six.

Mary Chickney had one more friend—quite a new acquaintance, that had been

formed since Owen's departure. Owen had warned her to be careful of new acquaintances, but this one had come with credentials from Miss Dell, and been introduced to her by that pearl of schoolmistresses, or rather had introduced herself by the name of Cherbury, when the grand carriage had brought her and Miss Dell one day from Ansted.

"Four miles each way are too much for you, my dear," Mrs. Cherbury had said to Ruth; "you are lighter than I am, but not so much set, and the horses require a deal of exercise—it's a dreadful weight on my mind those horses, and Isaac always looks cross when he hears I have not been out with them. So pray make use of my carriage, and take me with you to see the little Mary you talk so much about—I'm so very fond of children, you are aware. No denial, Miss Dell, no denial—if you're too proud for the carriage I'll walk with you, and have a fit on the road."

A terrible threat, that resulted in the carriage being ordered, and the lane by the side of Mrs. Cutchfield's house being blocked up for an hour or two.

This was Mrs. Cherbury's first visit, and was the precursor of many more—far more than Mrs. Cutchfield cared about, though she refrained from expressing her opinion, out of respect for the lady who was Miss Dell's friend.

"She do come a might of times too often," said Mrs. Cutchfield to a neighbour of hers as old as herself; "and the beastly sweet things she brings that child in pound parcels would ruin any constitution, if I didn't hide 'em as fast as they came, and make-believe the last but two lot is the last on 'em. A well-meaning lady, and fond enough of my Mary—as who wouldn't be?—but a trifle too often here, Mrs. Philpot."

Mrs. Cherbury was of the same opinion, though she found it a matter of difficulty to keep away; she had been all her life trying

to kill time; she was fond of children, and to this one in particular her warm heart had opened. "Here I am again, Mrs. Cutchfield," said she, "there's no keeping away, and I knew you'd excuse me. The horses wanted exercise too, the groom told me, and I'd rather come here than anywhere else whilst Miss Dell's busy. When will Mary be home from school?"

"About twelve, mum."

Mrs. Cutchfield generally began in a cold, almost a gruff manner, with Mrs. Cherbury, and only softened by degrees beneath the genial manners of her visitor.

"Shall I take the carriage and fetch her home?" suggested Mrs. Cherbury.

"It only stirs up the school, and makes the other children jealous, mum—but of course it's not the likes of me to hinder you. Not but what a run along the road does more good after school hours."

"So it does, so it does—but don't you fancy she's likely to be run over?"

"There's not much traffic, thank goodness, and she's more careful than she used to was, Mrs. Cherbury—minds the cross-roads, and keeps to the hedges. A brave girl that dear Mary of mine is, too," said the old woman, becoming more conversational; "to see her steer her way through a heap of bullocks, that'd frighten you and me to death, would do your heart good."

"Oh! dear—and it's market day!—I think I'll go and fetch her."

"She's done it for many years now, mum—pray sit still and don't fidget yourself."

"I hope I'm not fussy," said Mrs. Cherbury quickly.

"No, marm, I can't say as how you are," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "a little bit nervous, I should think—that's all."

"It's the great house—and alone in it so much," said Mrs. Cherbury with a sigh; "if I only had a daughter like your Mary. Daughters are a comfort young, and they

grow up a comfort to their mothers—but the sons forget us—always.”

“Better to have no sons at all, then,” said Mrs. Cutchfield sternly sententious.

“Forget us in their way, you understand,” said Mrs. Cherbury; “so much to think of, so few ties at home—the mother such an old-fashioned institution—such a waste of time to sit and converse with! Now, my lad, I believe, loves his mother as well as most lads, and would be very sorry if anything were to happen; give me a fussy funeral, and put a great pile of stonework over me; but he’s not a bit domesticated.”

Mrs. Cherbury wiped a stray tear from her eyes with a sudden dash of her fat white hand; and Mrs. Cutchfield was a fellow-woman who felt for her, and who excused her innovation for that day. Mrs. Cutchfield quite forgot the superior station of her visitor, likewise—sign of great tact and true lady-like management on Mrs. Cherbury’s

part—and took a chair by the fuschia-laden window-sill, and entered into her own grievances—her life, marriage, and widowhood—and the one son whom she had had, and who died cutting his teeth.

“So you’re better off than I am, Mrs. Cherbury,” said Mrs. Cutchfield; “and half a son’s better than no son at all—just like half a loaf.”

“My dear Mrs. Cutchfield, that’s exactly my sentiments.”

And the two old ladies jerked their chairs closer together at every moral reflection, until their knees touched. Ah! there’s nothing like a wholesome piece of gossip between two elderly females, to afford one an idea of a sense of enjoyment.

When Mary came dancing into the room, she was kissed heartily by each lady in turn. Mary had been running home, and the colour had flushed her cheeks and made her eyes sparkle.



“What a pretty creature she is now!” ejaculated Mrs. Cherbury.

“Lawks, don’t go on like that, and spoil the gal,” corrected Mrs. Cutchfield; and Mrs. Cherbury thus called to order, produced a large tin canister of acidulated drops, by way of peace-offering.

Mrs. Cherbury was a designing woman, —respect her as we may, and, grievous as it is to record the fact, we must be truthful chroniclers. She had made her appearance in that cottage with the secret motive of carrying Mary home to spend the afternoon with her, but had deferred breaking the news till Mrs. Cutchfield was in the best of tempers, and there was Mary’s persuasions to back her own. Then the truth came out slowly, and Mrs. Cutchfield felt sorry that Mrs. Cherbury had taken such a fancy to Mary one instant, and rather glad the next.

“She’s a rich lady, and it might be a good thing for Mary,” she thought; “and

she was too old a woman to be jealous, much less to let jealousy stand in the way of Mary's advancement. But, oh, my dear," she said, when she was putting on Mary's best Sunday frock upstairs, "don't be dazed by a fine house, and love mammy Cutchfield less than the fine lady who belongs to it. After all these years you won't do that?"

"Never, mammy—never!"

And Mary's arms were round the old woman's neck on the instant.

"Then go, and I hope you'll have a pleasant day—and mind they send you back early—and don't be dazed—and pray don't, for the Lord's sake, eat everything the lady wants you!"

Mary was whisked off in the carriage shortly afterwards, and a rare red letter-day in her recollections was that first visit to Oaklands. The great house, and the great garden where she could lose herself, and the park where there were deer, and the green lawn she could dance on, and the spotted

coach-dog with whom she fraternized. Then, not to mention picture-books, and great oil-paintings on the walls, and Mrs. Cherbury anxious to show and give her everything, and the funny silent man, who came in as she was putting on her bonnet to return, and to whom Mrs. Cherbury said, "This is the little girl I was speaking of, Isaac;" and who answered, "What little girl?" and then said, "How do you?—a fine evening, miss," to her, just as if she were a big woman. Mary had much to think of that day—a memorable day for her, still more so for the lady who had been kind to her. For the son—or the lad who was only half a son—had come home expressly to have a long talk with his mother, and long talks were quite out of his line, and must bode something singular. Mrs. Cherbury thought so—whether she were right in her surmise let the next chapter prove.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A CHANGE FOR MORE THAN ONE.

ISAAC CHERBURY and his mother were prepared thoroughly for a long talk. Isaac had dined in town, therefore there were no preliminaries to get through. Nothing to do but take the easiest chair in the drawing-room, motion to his nervous mother to subside into the opposite seat, and dash at once into his subject. He was a man of few words, and took the straightest, if not the easiest way to an explanation. He had abhorred circumlocution all his life.

“Mother, I have sold the business.”

"Bless my soul, Isaac!—whatever made you think of such a thing?"

"My head—it's growing heavier every day."

He was growing more of a hypochondriac his mother thought, although it was scarcely worth while to state so just then. Besides, she wouldn't have hurt her son's feelings for the world.

"I've been told so much about change doing me good, change working such cures in this and that, that I've resolved to try it. The business was in the way, but there was a good price—a very fair price," drawing in his breath, "offered, and a man can make money one way as well as another. Foreigners are always short of money, and pay an extraordinary per-centage."

"Go on, my dear lad, go on."

"So I sold the business, and it's off my mind, and still my head aches—damn it!" he muttered in a lower key.

"And what's to be done now; are we to

go abroad, and shall I sell this house that your father left me, or shall we let it till our return?"

"My arrangements, mother, will not put you out in any way—I'm going alone."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" cried the distressed lady.

She had thought there was something dreadful coming by his calling her mother—it was always "Mrs. Cherbury" when nothing was the matter. He called her mother when her husband died—he called her so again now he was going to leave her.

"Shall you be long away, Isaac?" she said, with a great gulp.

"I can't say—five or six years—it depends upon my head, in a great measure."

"Your head in a great measure—dear, dear me, it's very sad!"

Isaac sat with his knees crossed, twiddling his thumbs backwards and forwards; he wished to offer some consolation to

his mother—he did not see in what way exactly. He was not an unfeeling man—he was hard to move, and of a Sphinx-like appearance, but he respected his mother, and he knew that his mother loved him. He had a dreamy consciousness that he had never been a good son to her—in the old days he had been wild and inconsiderate; in the present icy existence he had been taciturn, and evinced nothing but a sense of being bored.

“You’re quiet—you’re so very quiet always,” murmured Mrs. Cherbury, by way of half reproach; “you never think of a mother’s advice, but do all without her, even to the selling of the business, which was your father’s pride. I think—I—I should have liked to have been told of it, even if you had made up your mind. Your poor father never kept me so much in the dark.”

“I never thought of it,” said Cherbury; “it’s a habit of mine to finish any plan before I speak—I’ve always found it

the best. Of course, I meant no offence."

"No, no, my dear child, I know that. You were never bad-hearted. You're only a little strange."

"I had a shock once," he said, "perhaps that accounts for it."

"A shock!" said the wondering mother.

"Yes—it's nothing worth speaking of—and how we are wandering, to be sure! Most unbusiness-like, unmethodical, and so unlike me. So, as I said, mother, I intend to leave England to-morrow."

"To-morrow—oh, you never said so!—you have never thought so, Isaac," said Mrs. Cherbury.

"Didn't I mention to-morrow—ah! well, I intended. To-morrow I leave for Paris. I shan't put your house much out of order by packing; one portmanteau of things will suffice."

"What will you do, all alone in a strange land, my dear lad?" said Mrs. Cherbury.

The thought struck him, what he should



have done with his mother; but he kept his thoughts to himself. He had every confidence in his powers to combat the dangers of foreign cities, he assured his mother—that is, he said bluntly “I’m all right,” which signified the same thing.

The long talk was over on his side; it had been a great exertion, and he was glad he had broken or thumped through the ice, and apprised his mother of the state of affairs. Mrs. Cherbury seemed anxious to sustain the conversation; to weary him with motherly advice upon matters concerning which she knew nothing—when would she ever understand that he was no longer a young man, but forty-five years of age, or thereabouts?—a cold, calculating man of the world, whose worldly knowledge everybody appeared to respect, save his mother.

He adopted the old ruse of closing his eyes, having previously stated it as his opinion that his head was a little worse than usual,

and his mother, well trained to obedience, sat silent and watched him. It was a great trial to her, this going away—this leaving her alone in the world. It would have been different, had there been a dozen children—half a dozen—only one more! But her first-born, her only son living—one whom she might never see again after the parting had taken place between them. A strange end to all a mother's dreaming she must have thought it that night, remembering her past fancy-sketches of that son, and of what a comfort he was to be in her old age. She wondered how it would have all been if she had been dependent upon him; if Mr. Cherbury had not left to her sole disposal the house in which she lived, and a fair round sum in Consols, to support the expenses entailed by so large an establishment. Would there not have been more sympathy between them, more concern on his part—might he not have offered then to take her with him? Was it selfishness

or indifference now, that led him to regard so coolly things of such moment to her?—did he ever think that she could not live for ever, and what a desolate death-bed her's might be? She cried a little to herself behind her laced handkerchief—not too passionately at first, lest she should disturb his slumbers, and he should wake up ill-tempered; and when her grief began to master her—for a stout woman will sob unpleasantly loud—she repaired to her own room, where no noise could be heard.

Mr. Isaac Cherbury went away the next day in the most quiet manner, shaking hands with his mother, and promising to write now and then when he had time, or there was anything to write about. Mrs. Cherbury could not have complained of any “fuss” in the parting—all the fuss in the matter was on her own side just then! It was a great blow to her that separation, although Isaac had been seldom at Oaklands, and had always left his mother too

much to herself. It had been consolatory to know he could be sent for if she were ill, or that she could seek him out if his head got the better or the worse of him; and if months passed away without their meeting, still the satisfaction of their contiguity remained. But it was all altered now, and Mrs. Cherbury was alone in the world!

She took to fretting after that close-hearted, lubberly lad of hers, and fretting disagreeing with a constitution naturally intended for sanguinity, drove her to a corner and took her off her feet. "Too much alone," said the doctor to Ruth, who spent every leisure moment at her bedside, "she only requires rallying. Not a great age by any means, and a good constitution to work upon."

When Mrs. Cherbury was down-stairs again, she saw more company. Her butterfly neighbours living in the great houses scattered round Ansted came to pay their respects and offer their mock sympathy;

but they seldom stayed more than ten minutes, and seemed always glad to escape from the house. She was a woman without marriageable sons, and never gave dinner parties or *thé dansantes*.

“My doctor has been talking of the sea-side this afternoon, Miss Dell,” said she, when Ruth had arrived to pay her usual evening visit. “Nice advice for an old woman like me. The sea-side, and not a friend amongst all the fussy crowds that assemble there. I’ve been thinking what a pity it was that I ’ever tried to make you Mrs. Glindon. I could have offered you such a nice post as companion. Whatever am I to do when that young surgeon takes you away for good?”

“I shall come and spend a week or two with you very often,” said she; “and you must return the compliment, and kill time that way.”

“Thank you, thank you, my dear—

that's a more cheering prospect. What has become of little Mary Chickney?"

"She's quite well, and very anxious to see you."

"God bless her heart! is she, though?" said Mrs. Cherbury, brightening up, "and I've been afraid to frighten her with my long faces. I will send the carriage for her to-morrow. If anything will do me good it's the sight of that child."

Mrs. Cherbury's carriage was in the lane before nine the next morning, and an earnest message from Mrs. Cherbury to Mrs. Cutchfield, with her love,—which set Mrs. Cutchfield all of a flutter, and made her as proud as a peacock—begging that Mrs. Cutchfield would not object to sacrifice one day of Mary's schooling for a poor old invalid's sake, to whom the society of children was a great boon. Mary went to Oaklands for the second time, saw more to admire and wonder at, took more than ever to the gentle, motherly lady, who had

always been so kind. Mary returned home to Mrs. Cutchfield with a second letter, which caused a second disinterment of a pair of tortoiseshell rimmed spectacles from a black worsted pocket.

"What a dreadful lot of writing, to be sure," said Mrs. Cutchfield. "Why don't she send a message? It gives a body such a heap less trouble."

"Shall I read it, mammy?"

"It mayn't be meant for your sharp young eyes. Perhaps you've been misbehaving, and I'm to tell your governess."

Mary laughed. She knew it could not be that—there was no misbehaving oneself at Oaklands. Mrs. Cutchfield read the letter, and then imparted the news.

"She wants me to tea to-morrow."

"You, mammy Cutchfield?"

"Ain't I good company enough for her?" she asked, harshly. "Is it such a wonder?"

"It seemed a little strange," said Mary, "because I don't remember you going to

tea more than twice, perhaps, and that at Mrs. Philpot's."

"Strange or not, I know all about it," said Mrs. Cutchfield, taking off her spectacles, and beating a nervous tattoo on the table with them. "It's not so strange but that I read my fine madam like a book."

"What is it, then?"

"You'll know to-morrow, mayhap."

And Mrs. Cutchfield closed all argument by stalking upstairs to bed.

At three in the following afternoon, much to Mrs. Cutchfield's surprise, and something to her satisfaction, though her countenance presented a Timon of Athens aspect, the carriage arrived for her. Mary was to stay with her governess until she was fetched in the evening, and, therefore, there was no fear concerning her on Mrs. Cutchfield's mind.

Arrived at Oaklands, Mrs. Cutchfield was speedily ushered into the drawing-room, at the open window of which—it was late in



the spring-time—Mrs. Cherbury sat. If Mrs. Cutchfield had arrived in a stern mood, she was speedily melted; for she said, very heartily,

“Oh! dear, I’m very sorry to see how you’ve altered, Mrs. Cherbury.”

“I’m getting better now, Mrs. Cutchfield—I was a sight last week.”

“So you are now, mum—fallen away like——”

“Yes, not quite so stout as I was. My son’s gone to live abroad.”

“So I’ve heard.”

“And perhaps I fretted because he wouldn’t take me—as if grown-up lads expected to be hampered with their tiresome mothers.”

She gave a little hysterical laugh, which having recovered from, she ordered tea, and a maid to show Mrs. Cutchfield where to put her bonnet—an office declined by that cautious female, who insisted on sitting with it in her lap, as if it were portable property

of some value, that might be made off with, if she did not take care.

A friendly gossip over tea, but the one subject that had led to the visit untouched upon, Mrs. Cutchfield felt quite certain. It was coming, when the servants had removed the tray, and the French windows were closed.

"Your little Mary has no relations, I believe?"

"I believe not, mum."

"Who is this Owen of whom she talks so much?"

"Her guardian—a young man who knew her parents."

"Poor?"

"Well, not particularly rich, I should say."

"He's in Australia, Mary tells me."

"In Austrayly, as Mary says, mum. Quite correct."

"I wonder whether he would mind—whether you would mind—my offering to adopt that child," said Mrs. Cherbury,

anxiously; "I would bring her up as my own daughter, love her as such, and leave her all my money. I want a companion like her for my desolate old age; she, I think, would learn to love me in return—and I've no one to study in the world *but* myself. I think her position in the future would be greatly enhanced by it, Mrs. Cutchfield—I am sure she would be happy here."

"It's a grand chance for her," said Mrs. Cutchfield, moodily; "it isn't for the likes of me, who loves the very ground she treads upon, to persuade her to say 'No.' It isn't even the place of one who is paid to take care of her—more, it isn't right. It's a grand offer."

"Do you wish I had not made it?" asked Mrs. Cherbury.

"For her sake, no—for my own, a desolate old woman, too, it's the truth to say 'Yes'—and I never shirked the truth."

"But I have been thinking of you, too—

I don't think I am very selfish; people never told me so."

Mrs. Cutchfield waited patiently for further particulars, and the stony expression of visage softened not.

"I don't see why you can't come here also?"

"No," was the short answer.

"Why you cannot at least enter my service, say as lodge-keeper," Mrs. Cherbury hastened to add; "there's a nice little cottage at the entrance-gates, and my visitors won't trouble you much—in fact, you may leave the gates open if you like, or take them off their hinges, which will save the worry of ever shutting them. Mary will not be far from you then, and can see you every day."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Cutchfield, slowly softening; "it's a kind offer of yours as regards me, too—you're a kind woman, I have always heard—I can believe it. But it's not that, exactly."

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, Mary loves me, next to her guardian, of anybody in this world—and it’s hard to have you step in and buy her from me. For it *is* buying her ! ”

“ No—don’t say that. I love the child, but I would not rob you of one scrap of her affection. ”

“ Won’t it all go naturally, if you try to make a lady of her ? ”

“ No—I’m sure not. ”

“ If I only thought that—and Mary *is* different from most children, ” said the woman ; “ and different or not—to be thought a deal on, or to be quite forgotten—I can’t stand in the way of such a rise in life for her. May I ask who else has been consulted in this matter ? ”

“ No one yet. ”

The old lady seemed gratified at the preference—the first shock over, the prospect did not appear so gloomy.

“ There’s a good many to consult—I

don't know but what some may stand in the way," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "there's John Dell, and there's Mr. Owen. And Mr. Owen's rather hard to manage, I should say. And there's Mary herself."

"We will set about the matter at once — I'll talk to Miss Dell to-morrow, and I'll write to Mr. Owen when I learn his address. You don't know how I've set my heart on having that child to love."

"Yes I do—I understand exactly."

This was the sum and substance of the dialogue between Mrs. Cherbury and Mrs. Cutchfield—the following day Ruth Dell was apprised of it, and John Dell written to.

There was some reflection on the matter; it naturally required careful consideration and looking at from all sides, but there was no mistaking the advantageous offer, and no doubting what was best for Mary Chickney. Dell was more adverse to the proposition than his niece, and in his interview with Mrs. Cherbury raised a hundred objections,

but common sense would come round to the one point, that it was a chance in life seldom offered, and Mary might ever afterwards reproach them for refusing it on her behalf.

Dell thought of the secret of her father, but he would leave that for Owen to communicate or not, as he thought fit. He even made some inquiry concerning Mr. Isaac Cherbury, his late employer, of the old lady, and somewhat startled her by saying, in answer to her statement of his living abroad—

“Then there is nothing to object to.”

Two letters went to Owen by the next mail—there would be many months to wait for an answer, Mrs. Cherbury thought, dolefully—one written by Mrs. Cherbury, the second by John Dell.

Mrs. Cherbury's letter was energetic and persuasive—Dell's laid the facts of the case before Owen as though they were the heads of an argument.

“Mary will be happy—well cared for in

the present, well provided for in the future—it is worth your earnest consideration,” wrote Dell; “I would not let any old thoughts which the name of Cherbury may conjure up, stand between you and Mary’s rise in life. I do not offer any advice myself—God alone knows what is best for the girl. I seek only to call your attention to the facts—you are her guardian, and the only one who has a right to decide. Mary has not been spoken to on the matter—let her wait your decision—whatever you tell her, we know she will abide by. Think well of her parentage, and whether it be necessary to inform Mrs. Cherbury.”

Owen’s reply came back in due course. Mrs. Cherbury was better then; sustained by the hope of the young companion she now saw so frequently, her old strength had returned. Owen wrote several letters by that post—the purport of each somewhat similar. From that to Mrs. Cherbury some fragments may be necessary.



In the first place, he thanked her for the offer, very coolly and briefly, and then referred her to his ward herself, if Mrs. Cherbury remained still of the same mind. He took that opportunity of adding, that had he alone the right to influence the after-life of his ward, he would have declined the offer, but he did not feel justified in incurring so grave a responsibility. He thought possibly it would be better for Mary to decide—he had been assured she would be in good hands—and therefore he left it to her good sense. He had even written to Mary, advising the acceptance of Mrs. Cherbury's offer, he said; weighing the advantages fairly and honestly in the scale, with that which he believed might prove disadvantageous to her.

“You will possess the love of a child that is amiable and affectionate,” he concluded; “I alone shall be the loser. Your scheme has altered my own, but it may be questionable whether mine would have made her so

happy. And her greatest happiness is of course my one consideration. For the present I remain her guardian—it is a trust I cannot relinquish to any one—I still reserve the right to advise and console when necessity requires it. No one must stand between me and my ward, until she is able to judge for herself. In four years times I shall see her again.”

Owen made no allusion to Mary's parentage; he had carefully studied the question, and arrived at the conclusion that it was better to keep it in the background. For Tarby's sake, he had no right to divulge the secret; for Mary's sake especially, he felt it would be acting unfairly. He did not know Mrs. Cherbury; he had had experience of how soon secrets escape, and he was too well aware of the blessing and comfort Mary would be to one, who offered her a position she would be sure to adorn. For the present, at least, let the secret rest.

Mrs. Cherbury could not exactly make

out the letter. It was an epistle that gave her the idea that Owen was a very stiff young man, with an unbendable back—a touch of her own lad! There was satisfaction in knowing there was a consent attached to it, and she hastened with the good news to Miss Dell, and then with Miss Dell to Mrs. Cutchfield, the latter of whom looked pleased and severe by turns, as though some one were pulling a string behind.

“I haven’t had such a trial since my old man died,” asseverated the old lady.

“And what does Mary think of it?”

“Oh! she’s been a-crying, and don’t know what to do for the best. I don’t think she likes to part with me, and the old cottage, after all,” added the old lady, proudly.

“Where is she?”

“Up-stairs, reading Owen’s letter for about the fiftieth time,” said Mrs. Cutchfield.

“What a hullabuloo there is when a letter of that young man’s comes, surely!”

“He advises her to go.”

“ Yes, if she can still be true to him as his ward—will obey him, if he requires it, in any case that he really thinks for her good. But here she is.”

Mary came down and glanced towards her three friends, and began to cry again.

“ You’re getting too old to cry now, you little g—g—goose,” said Mrs. Cutchfield, digging her own knuckles into her eyes to keep the tears back.

“ What shall I do ? ” she cried. “ Why did he leave this resolution to me ? Oh ! Mrs. Cutchfield, I don’t like to leave you—Oh ! Mrs. Cherbury, perhaps I shall never love you as you deserve ! ”

“ My dear Mary, I don’t feel that——”

“ And before all—always—for ever,” she cried, “ I shall love my gardy best—don’t forget that any one—what he says and wishes I must always do ! ”

“ Well, if he wish you away when he returns, it will make no difference in my intentions towards you,” said Mrs. Cher-

bury ; “ and shall not I have had four years of happiness ? ”

“ And you will not mind me staying too much with Mrs. Cutchfield at the lodge—I shall be true to all my old friends.”

“ God bless her now !—hear that ! ” and Mrs. Cutchfield executed a fandango movement in the background.

“ I shall mind nothing but your happiness, my dear,” said Mrs. Cherbury ; “ you won’t find me at all fussy.”

“ Then I’ll come and be a lady, and have a governess all to myself ! ”

“ That’s right—half a dozen, perhaps,” said Mrs. Cherbury ; “ My dear,” turning to Miss Dell, triumphantly, “ I’ve caught her ! ”

And she spoke as exultingly as an Isaac Walton’s disciple over a two-pound trout.

So the life of the child born in Hannah Street took another turn, and Mrs. Cherbury went away with her prize. Both were gainers by the compact, matron and maiden

—money, and education, and station, in exchange for priceless affection—rooms of empty splendour, to be filled with a bright presence—a desolate woman to be gladdened by a daughter's love.

The wealth of the world *versus* the wealth of the heart. The former, that a false friend, an evil rumour, a wrong step, can always snatch from us; and the latter, imperishable, and in misfortune ever a comforter. Surely this Mrs. Cherbury, a woman in a thousand, had obtained the best of the bargain.

## CHAPTER V.

## “TIME FLIES.”

MARY CHICKNEY was installed at Oaklands, and Mrs. Cherbury began a new life. Governesses and music-masters were sent for to perfect Mary's education, and a more liberal amount of pocket-money bestowed upon her than was probably judicious on the part of her new protector. But then Mary was not like other girls—nothing turned her head! A great house, servants to wait on her, an indulgent protector, tended to make the child grateful, not spoil her—and not all the finery in the world would have kept her from her daily visits to Mrs. Cutchfield at the lodge.

Mrs. Cutchfield even thought she came a little too often, and that Mrs. Cherbury might not like it after a while.

"Oh! she will never refuse me anything," said Mary; "I don't think she could be out of temper. And I can't give up mammy Cutchfield for anybody."

"But if she shouldn't like it, my precious."

"Then we'll go back to the old cottage and wait for Owen's return. I'm only waiting for dear Owen now, remember."

"Perhaps he will wish you to live here."

"What!—for ever and ever!"

"You can't do better, depend upon it."

"Oh! he will never wish that," said Mary, and she was very grave the remainder of the day at the thought.

Time went plodding on after the old fashion at Oaklands; summer followed the spring, and autumn the summer, and six months of life there had rendered the place home to Mary, sunshine to the old lady,



who was made to love children and be loved by them. Not an unpleasant destiny, however trivial it may seem to the reader, to whom children are troublesome little things, that are always in the way. He must be one of the right sort to win a child's love—no sham will go down with the juveniles. If they see the world in one's face too much, they will fly you—it must be something in your looks, or voice, or smile, which will bring them towards you, confident that the heart speaks in addressing them. Depend upon it, my friend, if children are fond of you, there's something of the true metal in your system, let wiser people behind your back say what they may.

Time made the best of friends of Mrs. Cherbury and Mary, who, by the way, deserves a better title than "only a child." Mary was fourteen when the autumn had come round, and if more childlike than most young people of her age in these precocious times, that is no reason we should take an unfair advan-

tage of her. A light, dancing, fairy-like girl, who gave life and animation to the whole house—certainly small for her age—but that made her all the more loveable, Mrs Cherbury asserted.

Readers well up in novels will be surprised to hear she evinced not a spark of genius, and was not clever in one particular. She only learned her lessons tolerably well, made no rapid improvement in the piano, sketched awfully, and dashed through a copy-book with a rapidity that took the breath out of her governess. "If she were not so anxious to finish everything, Miss Chickney would distinguish herself more," Miss Miffleton the governess asserted; "she's always in such a dreadful hurry to finish. She learns her lessons in half the time I ever knew anybody else, but she don't remember a word of them the next day, and is only anxious to know how long it will take to get to the end. But she's a dear girl, Mrs. Cherbury."

Miss Miffleton was really of that opinion, notwithstanding she knew which side her bread was buttered, and that which would always put Mrs. Cherbury in a flutter of delight. And Mrs Cherbury was always in a flutter now; here was something not only to love, but to repay her with love in return—she was happier than she had been for many years; and if her lad Isaac had only written to her a trifle more regularly, there would have been nothing to unsettle her mind. She had only received two letters from Isaac, during the six months—one dated Paris, and informing her that he was as well as he ever expected to be; the second St. Petersburg, apprising her of his opinion that he couldn't feel much worse. There was no news in either epistle, but he always promised to write a long letter next time, which was something that pleased his mother, and did not cost him anything.

Late in the autumn Arthur Glindon re-

turned to Surrey ; his term of probation was over, and he emerged upon the scene looking more pale, studious, and steady. No one meeting him at Mrs. Cherbury's with his affianced wife at his side, would have given him credit for so dangerous a temper as was exhibited two years ago at a few hundred yards distant.

"I have conquered all the evil spirits, Ruth," he said, confidently ; "they have vanished away to the depths, and you may trust me."

"Would you be sitting here if I doubted?"

"We shall be the happiest couple under the sun," said he ; "and under an English sun too, for I am growing very tired of that Scotch hospital."

"Never content, Arthur ; is not a restless spirit a weakness ?"

"It is not restlessness, only ambition," replied Glindon ; "surely it is honourable to try and make a step in advance. I think I shall work up for my M.D., become Doc-

tor Glindon, and pocket five-guinea fees. It would be a fine thing to be a physician, Ruth."

It had been a fine thing once to become head-surgeon of the hospital, Ruth gently hinted; and his answer was, that he had wished to rise in life for her sake, and the hospital had not realized his expectations. Besides, he was not comfortable; there was a young man petted too much by the Governor and Directors, thought very clever, and pushed in his way a little too often—a young fellow who actually wanted to teach *him* at times!

Was this the old jealousy putting forth a shoot in a new direction—the old demon of discontent that, driven from one corner, had squatted down in another, and was leering from under his hand at his victim? Ruth gravely asked the question, and he coloured and laughed. He jealous now?—jealous of the members of his profession?—was it likely?

He spent his days oscillating between

Ansted and London; he had come from Scotland to be married, and the hour fixed for so momentous a step every day approached nearer. Ruth had resigned her post at Ansted school, and was staying at Mrs. Cherbury's; she was happy, but it was a grave kind of happiness, peculiar to her who did nothing rashly, and had ever been of a reflective nature. She had promised to be his wife, and she loved him and hoped for the best; but there would come a doubt at times of how it would end. He was ever eager in pursuit, steadfast and persevering whilst the goal to be reached lay beyond—place all he had sought at his feet, and he turned to new wishes at once. Might he not some day turn from her, and might she not lose the power to keep him straight in his path?

She hoped not, she even believed not, or she would have never become Mrs. Glindon. Hers was an unpoetical mind like her uncle's, and she did not expect to marry a

perfect being; a hero who would not have his tempers and his weaknesses. She looked forward to being something of a guide, an adviser, a comforter, as well as a companion; she knew he might wander restlessly from the track—but she believed she would have power, by her love and gentleness and sense of right, to bring him back. He had the abilities to become a great man; she would use her best exertions to aid him in his career, ending not alone in greatness, she prayed, but in an orderly and Christian life.

They were married at Ansted Church, and Mrs. Cherbury gave a quiet wedding breakfast at Oaklands to the parties principally concerned in the match. There were no grand acquaintances asked, only those who had long known the young couple, or were related to them. Grand acquaintances would have gone home to laugh at all this, and say what a medley of people and mixture of caste!—what a quiet bride, and what an odd-looking fellow the bride's

father, and what a firm, straight-a-head-looking party the man with the ringing voice, who was called John Dell, seemed to be! "People in trade," grand people would have cried, and shuddered at the stigma, and thanked heaven they were not as other men were, and had livings to get by selling and buying. It is possible, even—92 being excited and off his guard, morally "unbuttoned," though outwardly braced tight—that the ex-policeman might have talked too much of antecedents, and strewn the drawing-room carpet with defunct "swells," to whom such revelations would have been a little too much.

So only John Dell and 92, and Mary Chickney and Mrs. Cherbury, assisted at the marriage of Arthur Glindon with Ruth Dell—and certainly they were a *melange*. Arthur Glindon's parents, proud and poor people, had they taken the trouble to cross the Channel, would have wondered at Arthur's wife's relations, as they had already



wondered at his marrying a schoolmistress,—he who might have done better! But then Arthur had had always a will of his own, and it was too late in the day to offer him anything but congratulations. They expressed a regret that their advanced age would not permit them to undertake the fatigue of a journey to England, hoped Arthur, in his leisure moments, would visit Germany, and bring Ruth with him, and sent their best wishes for the happiness of man and wife.

And with these best wishes, added to those uttered by full hearts at Oaklands, the young couple started on their way in life, and time went stealing on again, and marriages made in heaven and earth—thought of in a third place, perhaps, or what are divorce courts for?—took place every day, and all the hopes and fears belonging to them bore fruit after their kind, and good and evil went round with the world.

How the marriage progressed, whether light and shadow most predominated, this future history will, in its own time, declare. It is enough to say here, that one child was born when their marriage was twelve months old, and christened Arthur after its father, and that its mother was of opinion that it was the most extraordinary child in the world—a singular opinion for a mother, and therefore duly recorded in this place.

Time went on—say year after year, till Mary's sojourn at Oaklands was of four or five years date, and Owen's letters suddenly ceasing gave hope of his return, true to a past promise. Mary Chickney was in her eighteenth year then, with the "finishing process" reaching a termination, and Nature's finishing process turning her out a bright-faced, animated young lady of the *petit* order—a loveable, amiable, impulsive girl, who had the rare gift of making friends wherever she chose to take

a liking herself. In the quiet retreat at Oaklands echoed the cry,—general in the servants' hall as in the drawing-room, round about the village as at the lodge, where Mrs. Cutchfield dwelt, still hale and hearty,—that “there never was such a girl!”

“Why, the place is all sunshine,” said the cook to the butler, both old servants of the Cherburys; “what a difference to the time when we had that lump of a man about the house!”

“Ah, he was a stiff 'un!”

“What a man to begin fretting about!” further remarked the cook.

“I should a on'y fretted at his living so long, if I'd been his mother,” added the butler; and there was much hilarity among the subordinates at so caustic a speech.

They take us off unmercifully down-stairs these necessary evils; even when we think the honour of serving us, and the salaries we give them, have gained their respect.

Isaac Cherbury had favoured his mother

with two more letters during those four or five years—both dated from India, where he had ostensibly settled down. He hoped his mother was well—he wished he was! Sometimes he fancied he should try England again, and the medical advisers of his own country—he thought no one understood how to manage his head in the East.

John Dell was still hard at work—would be always working hard till his name was struck off the list of toilers and “moilers.” He had never understood what it was to sit still and let the workers go by him—give him a day’s leisure, and he was miserable till his holiday was over.

His business had progressed largely—eight hundred men went in and out at the strokes of his factory bell. John Dell was known to the trade as a practical engineer, a man who turned out his work well, and to the very day on which it had been promised.

Energetic and yet methodical, having a time and place for everything, a keen eye for a flaw, and a good method of drill, he naturally succeeded. He had anticipated success when he first made his venture; now he was bidding fair to become a rich man. Increase of orders, contracts of magnitude, were perhaps a little too much for one brain. If he could only find a partner, he thought, to share the labour, and work upwards with him—a partner who would not flinch at the wheel—he should have nothing to wish for. If Owen would only keep his word and come back, a little less proud and independent than when he started, now! And Owen would come back, he had not a doubt of it—though from Owen's letters he judged that his friend would be a reserved man. Owen had only hinted at progress, and had not thrown much light upon the nature of his business, or the profits it might be bringing him in. Of the present he wrote little—of the future, nothing. Whether he would

say more when they were face to face, John Dell doubted.

John Dell doubted if the six years since their parting would have improved Owen ; still, he was not of a morbid disposition, and he hoped for the best.

Dell still lived alone, in his quiet quarters, in the Kennington Road, with a middle-aged housekeeper to attend to his wants. He had thought once or twice of a country villa down the line somewhere, but he was careful of his money, and in no hurry to launch into extravagance.\* He did not want a great house all to himself—for he was a sociable being when he had time. More than once he had proposed to his brother to give up the cottage at Ansted, and live with him ; but 92 had had so much bustle in his early life, that his brother's brisk manner alarmed him.

“ You'd worry me, John ; I ain't methodical enough,” he said ; “ and now you're growing a rich man, I don't feel exactly grand enough.”

"I'm no grander than I ever was, stupid," cried Dell.

"No, but it looks like it, and I'm sure my pottering ways would fidget you. I'm much better here, with my vegetables, than bothering you or Ruth's husband too much. Not but what it's very dull work," he added, with a sigh, "and I'm still thinking of starting a little business."

"I'll set you up in one to-morrow."

"Yes, but you can't set me up with a practical partner, no more than you can find one for yourself."

"What business are you thinking of?"

"Well, I'm blessed if I know, John!"

"I'm blessed if *your* brain isn't softening," commented his uncomplimentary brother.

The fact was, 92 had long since grown tired of the country and ashamed to avow it—discontented, like Glindon, Owen, half the world, with the Present. He was an old man, who had his crotchets; having formerly

been accustomed to moving on people, standing still had long since grown monotonous. He did not know what he wanted exactly; he was not fit for the police force, he had not a great deal of energy, he didn't want to be a bore to his brother, or a nuisance to his son-in-law; he was conscious that his slow movements would try John's temper too much—John had often said he hated people creeping about the house—and he had the good sense to know that Arthur Glindon would respect him most at a distance. Glindon had never wounded his feelings by so much as a hint to that effect; but 92 understood human nature, and could guess what the result would be. Therefore, he only called twice or thrice a-year to see his daughter; and although he saw his daughter more often, it was for the reason that Ruth came to Ansted.

92 was at work in his garden, when a tall man, in a black coat a trifle too short for him, stopped near the rickety gate and in-



tently watched the process of hoeing. It was a fair spring afternoon, and 92's rheumatism had taken a turn for the better along with the weather. He could hobble more easily along the indifferently-weeded paths, and charge the "wort weed" and groundsel that would come up along with the early peas; or rather that were troubled with peas shooting up in their midst.

92, intent on his labours, and full of reflection, did not observe the stranger until he had hoed, in a feeble manner, one-half of the bed, and had changed his position, with his face to the gate. 92 stood up to survey the stranger and straighten his back a bit; he had expected to see a neighbour, and the gentleman was new to Ansted.

"Good evening," said the stranger, however.

"Good evening," responded 92.

"How far do you reckon it to Oaklands, sir, if I may take the liberty to ask?"

"Not above a mile, I should say."

"Mrs. Cherbury's, isn't it?"

"Cherbury's it be," said 92, "as any one might know in these parts."

"Ah! I don't belong to these parts."

92 and the last speaker looked steadily at each other again—the last speaker for a moment seemed to flinch a little. 92 could not account for his flinching; he did not remember the man, who was tall, and round-shouldered, and pock-marked; and yet he had a dreamy consciousness of having met with him before. Very possibly one he had taken up or moved on in official days; and yet almost too quiet and steady-looking for that.

"Isn't your name Dell?" was the inquiry.

"Such it is, sir."

"You were a policeman once—92?"

Certainly one who had cause to remember his number. Yes, 92 it was—what made him remember him?

"Nothing particular," said the man; "I lived Lambeth way once, and knew your

brother by sight—that's all. But I didn't expect to run against you all of a heap, like. How you've altered."

"Since when?"

"Ah! since a lot of years—more than I care to recollect," was the reply. "How bad the peas look!"

"It's the cussed birds—they eats the tops off," said 92; "never knew such birds for peas as there are in these parts. Do you know, I'm trying to bring your face to mind?"

"Try away."

And the man laughed, and leaned against the fence, and stood 92's scrutiny.

"I've seen it, and I ain't—pair-of-socksical, eh?"

"Eh?" repeated the stranger, in some bewilderment.

"What people call pair-of-socksical—it is and it isn't. It's a face I know; but I don't think it was exactly that face when I *did* know it, you see."

"I see."

"And so I give it up."

"Well, it ain't the same face," replied the man—"it's altered; and years do alter faces, people, and all manner of things. You'll see it again in a couple of hours or so."

"Are you off?"

"Yes, I'm off—good-day, for the present."

"Good-day to you—and a rum customer *you* are," he added, in a lower tone, "and a rummer you've been. A Tower-street customer, possibly."

The stranger, who was a fast walker, was soon up the hill, on the brow of which he paused, remembering he had not inquired of 92 the way to Oaklands. He did not think it worth his while to go back, however; he put one hand in his trousers-pocket, and took his hat off with the other, and then dawdled along at a very leisurely rate. Coming upon a roadside inn a few hun-

dred yards to the right, he veered out of his path, and went beneath a shady clump of trees into the passage, and awoke the landlord from his afternoon nap under the lemon-net. Having inquired the way to Oaklands, and been rewarded with a very surly "To the left—you can't miss it!"—for landlords of public-houses object to inquiries without orders, especially if they are awoke up to answer them—the man went straight out of the house, and set off at a smart pace.

His mode of progression was certainly eccentric, for, after a sudden halt, as if to remonstrate with himself, he adopted the dawdling rate again. Evidently he was a fast walker, whose intention was made up to walk slowly, but whose old habits were a trifle too strong for the intention.

He fell into a pretty equable kind of goose-step after the last remonstrance, till within sight of Oaklands, when he came to a full stop, and looked round for something

convenient to set his back against. Finding nothing but hedge-rows, separated from the foot-path by a narrow ditch, he stood in the middle of the road, with his hat still off, gazing before him at the landscape.

A sun-burnt, weather-beaten face, and much lined as well as pock-marked—a face which gave one the idea that its owner had seen trouble, or had suffered a great deal.

The man stood there a considerable time, might have remained there much longer, had not a milkman's horse and cart come rattling down the road. After stepping aside, he held up his hand to attract the attention of the cart's occupant, and said,

“That's Oaklands, isn't it?”

“Yes,” said the driver.

“Thank'ee”

A few more steps towards the journey's end, and then the ditch ending abruptly, and a sloping bank in its place—a fair resting-spot for a man who seemed unsettled in mind. He put his hat on, and leaned

against the bank, keeping his eyes towards Oaklands, and pulling up little shreds of grass, which he let drop through his restless fingers.

If the stranger's mission closed at Oaklands, what kept him without the pale of the journey's end, idling time on the hedge-banks? Was the past a weight with him, or was the present difficult to face?—or was he, after all, nothing but a way-side loiterer, inclined to take his time and enjoy the landscape that lay before him?

He was in no hurry now, whatever he might have been; the stable clock at Oaklands chimed the half-hour past four, struck five, chimed the half-hour past five, and still he sat there, watching the white house amidst the distant trees, and plucking the grass with a nervous hand.

“No, this won't do,” he said at last, and giving an extra tug to his hat, which brought it very low over his forehead, he jumped to his feet and walked on rapidly.

He would not falter now, lest his heart should falter with him; he had come a long journey, and it must not end in nothing, and he go back like a fool.

He was at the lodge-gates, which were open—there was a bell ready to his hand, but the hand felt like lead, and refused to be raised. He might have turned away even then, if an old woman had not made her appearance from the lodge and confronted him.

“Do you want any one here, young man?”

The gentleman addressed was not young enough to deserve the cognomen, but anything under sixty was gay youth to Mrs. Cutchfield. She had seen eighty odd summers, and was getting old herself now,—but she did not think the world was becoming old with her.

“Yes,” said the man, hoarsely.

“What’s your business, may I ask?”

“I’ve—I’ve brought a message to a lady who lives here—a young lady.”



"Miss Chickney?"

The man nodded.

"Lord bless us, what a man to stare!" was the inward comment of Mrs. Cutchfield.

"Well, what's the message? You may trust me with it, for, old as I am, I've an excellent memory."

"I was to give it to her myself."

"Oh, it's something important, then?"

"Yes."

"Nothing to frighten her, I hope, my good man?" asked the alarmed Mrs. Cutchfield.

"Oh, no—nothink at all."

"Will you wait in the lodge, or go up to the house? Miss Chickney isn't at home at present."

"Will she be long, do you think?"

"I don't think she will—I can't say exactly."

"I'll—I'll step into the lodge, please."

Mrs. Cutchfield led the way into the neatly-furnished lodge, and placed a chair

for the new-comer. Whether by accident or design, the chair was placed full in the light, a position that the stranger appeared to object to, for he backed the chair against the wall, and sat down, nursing his hat. Mrs. Cutchfield had been interrupted in her tea when the stranger at the gates had attracted her attention, and she proceeded to pour out her second cup after the gentleman had placed his chair to his mind.

Very grave and thoughtful was Mrs. Cutchfield over that second cup of tea—the coming of the man perplexed her. There was nothing remarkable in a person bringing a message to Miss Chickney—it might be from the town and the tradesfolk—but the man had said it was a matter of importance, and the statement kept her inwardly fidgety. And then there was something in the man that puzzled her—he was not from Ansted, for she knew every one in the town—he looked like a man who had been burnt a little in forrin' parts, or at all

events had had a deal of knocking about in the sun somewhere. He was so silent a man, too, and hardly seemed to be composed enough for one who had only a message to deliver to her Mary. Perhaps if she bribed him with a cup of tea—he looked thirsty—he would become more communicative, and, oh, dear! she felt so dreadfully curious-like!

“Will you have a cup of tea, sir?”

“Thankee, ma’am—thankee,” said the stranger; “I don’t know but what it might do me a little good.”

“Ain’t you well?”

“Oh! I’m well enough,” was the brisk answer.

“Your message hasn’t been a heavy one to bring here,” with a shrewd look at him out of one eye.

“N—no,” was the reply; “I said not.”

The cup of tea was held towards her visitor, who rose, thanked her once more, and took the tea back with him to the shadowy

place wherein he had ensconced himself.

"I just hinted it, because a bad message to Mary Chickney might upset her mind—it's hard not to be prepared for anything."

"You're right."

"She's a tender-hearted girl, and hasn't been used to bad news."

"And I haven't brought any."

"Oh!"

The stranger blew and stirred at his tea till fully convinced of a lower rate of temperature, then he took the beverage off at a gulp—castor-oil fashion.

"I suppose you know Miss Chickney by sight, young man?"

"Well—let me see now—"

Mrs. Cutchfield had not supposed anything of the kind, but she was becoming more anxious to draw out her guest. She waited for the result of the man's mental reflection very patiently. No, he didn't think he knew Miss Chickney—he was a

"You're from forrin' parts, then?"

"I'm from London."

"Then you can't know anything of Miss Chickney, who hasn't seen London since she was a very little girl."

"I think I saw her once about these parts—a tall girl with brown hair."

The stranger was drawing Mrs. Cutchfield out in his turn, and that lady, less on her guard, dashed into the subject at once.

"You're very wrong there—her hair's as black as jet, and she's a little mite of a thing for a young woman—light as a fairy, and such sperrits, and so good-hearted! Lord bless you, sir, nothing would ever turn that girl's heart from old friends—she's full of true feeling and real love for everything and everybody. She's cut out for an angel, and I've allus got the fear that she'll be whisked away when none of us expect it."

"Ain't her health good?" asked the man, quickly.

"She never knew a day's illness in her life—she's been blessed as yet, as well as she has been a blessing. She fits any station, and becomes it, Lord love her heart, she does!"

"I suppose she looks as if she had been born a lady?"

"How do you know she hasn't?" sharply inquired Mrs. Cutchfield.

The man looked confused, and passed one large brown hand over his forehead, as if sweeping back the short hair that had not intruded thereon.

"It's the talk about—there's no secret in it."

"N—no," said Mrs. Cutchfield, keeping a dubious eye on the man still; "but I didn't think it had got to London."

"Couldn't I hear it coming along?"

"Yes, you might; people do cackle about here awful. Have another cup of tea, young man?"

"No, thankee."

"Then pass over the cup and saucer, please; you'll fidget with it till you break it. Look as if she'd been born a lady!" repeated Mrs. Cutchfield; "of course she does—of course she would. I knew she would when they took her away from me, who had the rearing of her from the tiniest prettiest child you ever clapped your eyes on. And I never lost that child's love, sir," she cried proudly; "the great house made no change in her, and it never will, however long I'm spared to see her."

Voluble and ancient ladies who have a pet subject to discourse upon, are not always pleasant company, but this messenger thought otherwise. He had changed his easy position with his back to the wall, and sat leaning forward with a hand on each knee, all attention. He scarcely breathed for fear the old lady should stop short in her discourse, and break the spell that was on her, and that seemed to rest on him, and take him from the outer world wherein

he must have experienced much hardship. Had he known more of Mrs. Cutchfield, he might have felt perfectly easy on the score of interruption: she would have run on for hours concerning the merits of little Mary, time could scarcely abate her eloquence, or put an end to her anecdotes. Bless her with a patient listener, and give her a quiet evening after tea, with nothing on her mind but the tea-things, which she could "wash up" and talk over, and "how she could go on about that girl!"

"But here she comes!"

And the old lady, quick of hearing, and not slow in her movements, ran to the lodge-door. The man kept his place, and laid his head back once more against the wall. Mrs. Cutchfield thought him a person very short of breath—a lazy person, too, who wanted waiting on, and stuck close enough to the chair, goodness knows, and didn't seem inclined to show much civility by rising.



He had risen, however, before Mary came into the lodge, and was standing twisting his hat round in his hands.

"Here's a man brought a message to you, Mary."

"Oh! I hope it's a nice one!"

"He's waiting in the lodge."

The rustle of a light muslin dress, and then Mary Chickney, in the lodge parlour close to the man who regarded her so curiously.

"You bring me bad news!" she exclaimed; "don't keep it back. Let me know the worst!"

"No bad news," he said very huskily; "don't distress yourself, it's quite contrairy."

"It's about Owen—Mr. Owen of Melbourne?" she said eagerly.

"Yes, Miss, it's about him."

"Well, well, well! What does he say?—have you brought a letter from my dear guardian? What a big, awkward snail you are, sir!"

"Beg pardon," stammered the man, "no, it's not a letter, only a message—if I was coming this way, just to call and say that he was on his journey home."

"I know that—he wrote to tell me that," cried Mary; "but you're very kind to come and tell me, sir. It's the good news over again," she added, clapping her hands; "and dear Owen thought he'd make quite sure. You're very kind, sir, to come all this way, you're—where's my purse?—I wonder where my purse is?"

"Don't be in such a flurry, Mary dear—what a girl you are!" said Mrs. Cutchfield.

"Don't give me money, please," said the man; "I don't want it—ain't short of it."

There was something in the man's voice that checked Mary in her search for her purse; an offer of money he seemed to imply would be an insult to him. A strange man, not badly dressed, and yet one whom nobody would have taken for a gentleman.

"I beg pardon. And oh! sir, do you

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know my Owen? Did you know him in Australia?"

"I have known him many years, miss."

"How's he looking?—sit down and tell me all about him. Has he altered much in six years? *Do sit down!*" urged the impetuous Mary.

"I haven't seen him for some time," said the man; "he wrote to me—that's all."

"What's your name?"

"Miss?"

"What's your name?—you're a friend of Owen's—I should like to know your name."

"Van—Van Demon," said the man with a dash.

"What a funny name!" ejaculated Mrs. Cutchfield; "I thought you weren't English by your manners, long ago."

"No, marm—exactly," said he; "and I'll go now if you please, Miss Chickney—and God bless you here and arterwards!—and my head aches, and I must have fresh air."

He reeled slightly in his walk as he made

for the lodge door—standing against it, he held by the door-post for a moment and looked back. “What a strange, wild looking man!” thought Mary; “and why does he stare at me so hard?”

She trembled even a little, and glanced at Mrs. Cutchfield inquiringly. Had the man been drinking on his way to Oaklands, she wondered, that he should give her his blessing, and then regard her so strangely?

“Good evening,” she said.

“Good evening;” and the man turned, went down the one step into the gravelled carriage road, gave one hasty glance back as he passed through the lodge gates, and then strode away at a great pace. There was no dilatoriness in his progress now—he marched on rapidly, with his head a little bent. The sun was going down behind the hills—workmen from the town, and field labourers, were wending their way along the road—up from the east the twilight and the stars were coming.

OWEN.

“ Well, I’ve seen her,” he muttered ; “ just for once and all, I’ve seen her, thank God ! After all these years, how precious odd it seems ! ”

A man met him, walking as fast as he—went rapidly past—stopped. The messenger, deep in thought, and with head still bent, continued his way. He who had stopped, turned, and went as rapidly back again, seizing the thoughtful man by the arm.

“ Stop !—surely I know you ? Fourteen years ago you were a friend of mine.”

The men looked each other in the face. The messenger saw before him a man as tall as himself—a dark-haired, dark-skinned man, with eyes that seemed to pierce him through. Fourteen years ago it was the face of a child, and he had seen it last through a prison grating.

“ *Owen !* ” he cried.

“ *Tarby !* ”

END











